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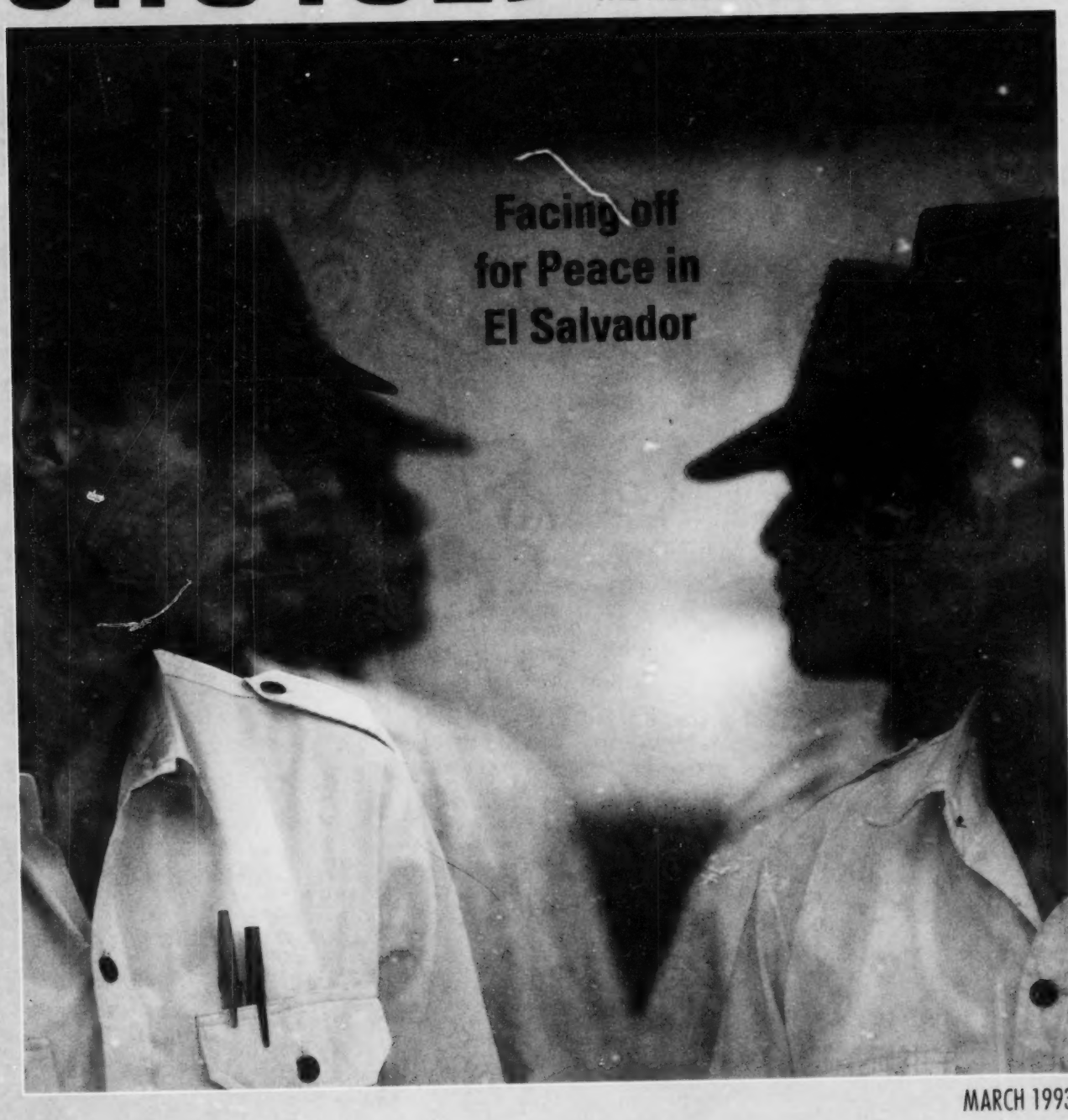
THE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT MAGAZINE



Facing off for Peace in El Salvador

MARCH 1993

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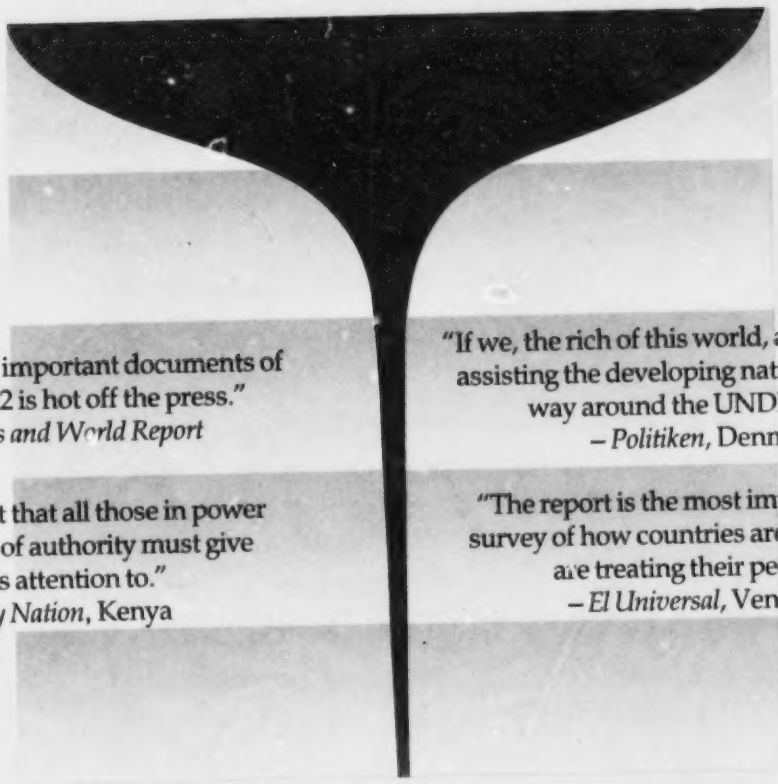

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Cover photo of the civilian police academy in San Salvador by Peter Taylor.

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READEX
RICHE

El Salvador Reconciles Its Past

By Mary Jo McConahay

An ambitious peace plan put in place with help from the United Nations is setting this Central American country on a path of reform and development. Already, a human rights commission and civilian police force are being established, and ex-guerillas are trading in arms for training in fields such as agriculture and health.

San Salvador, El Salvador – Life has come back to the road to Suchitoto. Grinning young boys on bicycles overtake lumbering oxen in wooden yokes. The farmers are wearing coloured shirts, not the black and grey they favoured for years in attempts to make themselves less visible when fire-fights erupted around them.

Like other roads in El Salvador, this one, in the north-central part of the country, rolls past humble houses shattered by aerial bombing in more than a decade of war. But the attacks have ceased, and today we are able to drive the cracked asphalt at a steady pace, not furiously around curves to avoid ambush, or slowing before lonely, open stretches to look for smoke before speeding ahead. The impulse remains to dive when a loose rock hits the windshield with a cracking sound like that of a bullet; but the heart resumes beating again more quickly than it once did, just a few months ago.

Since signing peace accords brokered by the United Nations in January 1992, both sides in the civil war have said they are committed to changes that go to the roots of the conflict. In the centre of Suchitoto, I see the coffin shop on a corner of the main square closed for the first time in memory; on a side street a man climbs a step-ladder to dip his trowel into a bucket of plaster and fills in holes the size of fists on his house, pocked by projectiles from both sides. Yet those who suffered here say they remain "cautious," and do not yet believe the mood of accommodation is irreversible. After 12 years of war, they say, these are the most delicate months of all. Both sides missed 31 October deadlines: rebels for final demobilization, the government for purging officers and cutting troops. Eyeing each other warily they pledged new dates.

"This is a military base, and we must remain prepared, even while our combatants are studying to re-enter civil society," said a 32-year-old guerrilla *responsable* at Aguacayo, near Suchitoto. Once a prosperous candy-making town reduced largely to rubble, Aguacayo is one of 15 concentration areas throughout the country where more than 8,000 rebels wait out the demobilization of their forces, monitored by UN observers.

Right: **A rebel turned student studies in Aguacayo, a concentration area for former FMLN combatants.**

Peter Taylor/UNDP

FMLN
END

The camp's simple infrastructure, its teachers, its very food are parts of the United Nations Development Programme's US$ 9.2 million effort to help this country's five million people bridge the treacherous gap between war and tranquillity. Other elements of the ambitious effort stand in higher profile: a new Supreme Electoral Tribunal; a training academy for a 6,000-officer civilian police; an independent Ombudsman's office to serve as the country's top guardian of human rights. Funding for the programme has been raised from a number of bilateral donors in the form of cost-sharing and trust fund arrangements.

A dental clinic at Aguacayo, where demobilized soldiers receive treatment.

But this remote camp in the former killing fields is symbolic of the thinking that shapes the wider effort: the peace accords and reconciliation will become concrete only as truly new perspectives take hold, and if newly-created democratic institutions are both well-understood by ordinary Salvadorans and unstained by connections with a violent past.

At Aguacayo, we pick our way through gardens long gone feral, among tents and open-walled sheds. Here young men and women dressed in tattered jungle camouflage listen to instructors brought in from the National University. With their automatic rifles resting nearby, some of the rebels-turned-students master basic literacy, others study to enter state grammar or high schools or for the new civilian police academy mandated in the accords. The *responsable* still will give only his *nom de guerre*, Martín, and insists the cease-fire could break "at any moment." But his deepest preoccupations appear to have taken a decisive turn. He frets most not about "the enemy," but eminently civilian concerns: How do we get the students best prepared for Ministry of Education exams? After a decade away from their fields, what do those going home to farming need to know about new production techniques?

A nearby clinic, as one medic describes it, is "an old house that had trees growing through the floor before we cleaned it up." Here, a 21-year-old named Herman who learned to read and write in a refugee camp, pulls teeth, working quickly and skillfully. Herman was recently trained in a crash course by an odontologist from the UNDP-supported project, and hopes to become a proper dentist when he is demobilized. Other medics complain the emergency humanitarian aid project doesn't provide for very young children, since it is geared to needs of ex-combatants. They demonstrate herbal medicines they have concocted to treat diarrhoea and respiratory ailments among the many kids who have inevitably come to call the camp theirs too.

At one time the guerrillas of the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) were terrified that crowded life in the concentration areas might do what the army couldn't accomplish in years of fighting: defeat them mortally, because cholera now claims lives across the region. But quickly-installed clean water spigots, latrines and health education measures appear to have headed off catastrophe: not a single case has been reported in any of the camps since troops began gathering in February. It is odd to hear the success of an effort quantified by what doesn't happen — such as a cholera epidemic, for instance — but that is the measure often used around the camps.

Since signing peace accords brokered by the United Nations in January 1992, both sides in the civil war have said they are committed to changes that go to the roots of the conflict.

"We haven't seen a breakdown in discipline," says a blue-beret UN observer monitoring the separation of forces. "No one has dropped out of my class," says a teacher. Leaving concentration areas, like this one outside Suchitoto, I can appreciate for the first time the beauty of grey-green mountains in the distance. We are not searching nearer hills for signs of danger, not driving fast to beat the dark, hearing no fire.

Two hours southeast by car, in his office in the capital of San Salvador, UNDP Resident Representative Walter Franco explains why involvement in the peace process here is "a

Photos by Peter Taylor / UNDP

FLMN headquarters at the concentration area at Aguacayo.

unique moment for the United Nations as a whole." It has been a massive effort – by mediators, military peace-keepers, human rights monitors and development experts – to help end a savage war, and now to support reconstruction in a hands-on way. The venture has no precise precedent, and remains incomplete. Yet as the case of El Salvador unfolds, says Mr. Franco, it becomes living proof that the traditional UN political and development roles can be expanded to support a country's transition to democracy.

In a time of dramatic changes in the world's political order, the global reach of the model here becomes important as never before.

"For the first time the United Nations, which has acted as an observer during negotiations elsewhere, itself brokered an accord between government and an armed internal opposition," says Mr. Franco. In fact, the UN role in bringing peace to the country has been elaborate, even beyond brokering the accords. During the heated mid-1980s, the United Nations Children's Fund won cooperation from both sides to establish "peace corridors" for massive vaccination campaigns, affording the entire country its first cease-fires for a day or two at a time, showing fatigued Salvadorans that guns might be silenced after all. In 1991, while talks progressed, dozens of international human rights monitors fanned out across the country under the umbrella of ONUSAL, as the El Salvadoran UN presence is known. Military officers in ONUSAL from several countries observe the separation of forces and receive weapons from demobilized rebels. Since the cease-fire, special envoys Alvaro DeSoto (who brokered the accord itself) and Marrack Goulding have come to El Salvador to mediate at crisis points and help the agreements to completion.

"Months before the cease-fire," says Mr. Franco, "UNDP began looking ahead, urging unions, universities, churches, the armed forces and non-governmental organizations to be aware of the need for postwar reconstruction."

Even while the bullets flew and an exhausted population settled into deep skepticism about hopes for peace, Mr. Franco's staff contracted international reconciliation experts to meet with authorities, and elaborated a reconstruction plan, "holding the faith when few others did." For months it was the only plan either side had. In January 1992, both sides in the civil war met in Mexico to sign sweeping accords, which not only call for an end to fighting, but include complex mandates to address long-term political, social and economic problems. Experts like Mr. Franco note the negotiations had roots in what Central Americans call "the Esquipulas process," named after the Guatemalan town where presidents of the region first began meeting in the stormy mid-1980s to quell the region's wars; thus the Salvadoran agreement links peace with development, an "Esquipulas" understanding. Both sides assign a full role to UNDP in the accords: to raise the reconstruction funds, to provide emergency humanitarian relief, to contribute technical and administrative expertise to the new institutions in which Salvadorans are putting so much hope.

The day is growing long and Mr. Franco is reviewing options: he is trying to figure exactly where, in a country with

Jason Bleibtreu / Sygma

Rebel fighters returning home following the signing of peace accords in January 1992.

insufficient and already overcrowded schools, to instruct 7,000 ex-guerrillas and soldiers in farm management and marketing. "Another logistical nightmare," Mr. Franco says later. In practice, the high-minded "peace with development" idea is a daily wrestle.

"It is our next adventure: to train these rather young people, who've done little besides carry a gun for years, to be farmers," Mr. Franco says. This phase must proceed quickly: even if they receive land and credit immediately, the agricultural cycle has ended, and thousands of combatants will have nothing to do until the next planting season begins in six months. The training programme will be carried out by local institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), with UNDP providing coordination and financial support.

By comparison, next door in Nicaragua, disaffected and often unemployed ex-fighters from both sides of the civil war have joined to form bands that demand benefits, and have wreaked violent havoc in the countryside. In El Salvador, delays in implementing accords mean even the best laid plans – such as training farmers, or determining how much food to allot to concentration areas for periods growing unexpectedly longer – must be constantly revised. When Mr. Franco speaks of this epoch in El Salvador he calls it"unique," or "transcendental." He never says "easy."

Except for the terrifying days of the FMLN offensive in late 1989, which turned the tide of the war toward serious negotiations, the capital city has never felt like a combat zone in the way the countryside has. But today it might be difficult for the newcomer to believe conflict ever riddled San Salvador at all: there are choking traffic jams, new clubs and cafes for clients unafraid to risk streets at night, and construction on all sides.

Beneath the veneer of quick recovery, however, the core of life is taking longer to change. Years of polarization and the fact of 75,000 war dead mean Salvadorans must overcome fresh, sharp memories to transform a still-impoverished country into the non-militarized democracy they say they want.

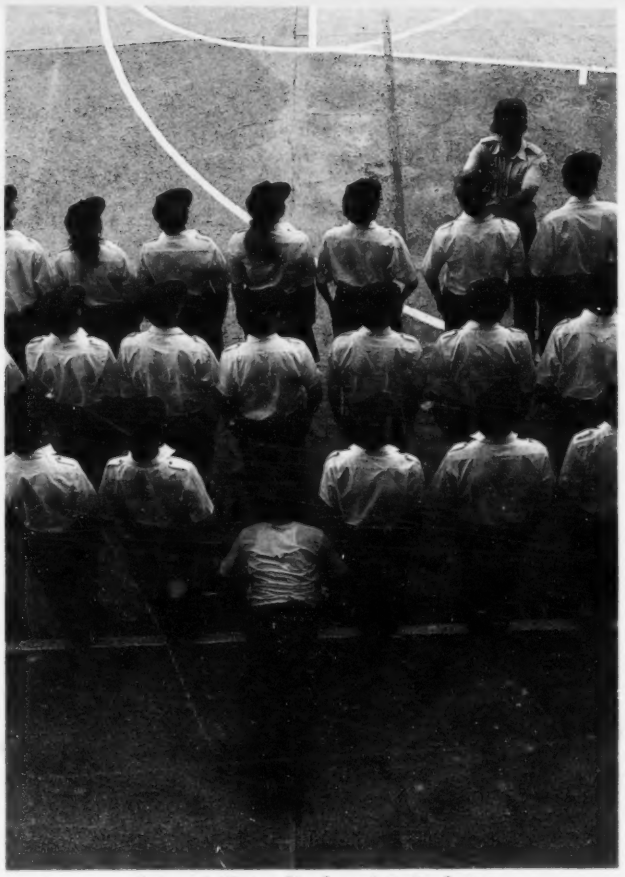
"Human rights abuse, and the habit of fear, do not change overnight," says Diana de Oqueli, director of the Office of the Attorney General for Human Rights, one of the institutions created by the peace accords. Different from any other rights office in the region, this one has a clear mandate and wide powers in a reformed national constitution, including discretion to seek its own funds. Ms. Oqueli cannot say there is no more abuse of ordinary citizens. She can say a start is being made.

"We are receiving more *denuncias*, reports of human rights violations, than we expected – about 200 a month," she says. "Right now our principal task is to obtain trust by demonstrating impartiality, and monitoring rights throughout the country, so people will know we want to be at their sides." There must be no reason why any Salvadoran, of any political stripe, should go about his legitimate business in fear of authorities, she continues.

Here the director's voice is especially firm. I think of the day three years ago when news spread that Hector Oqueli, a widely-respected opposition politician and official of the Socialist International party, had been kidnapped death-squad style on his way to the airport in Guatemala City. His body was found dumped near the Salvadoran border, an execution wound in the head. Now here was his widow saying, "no more."

"We are determined to create a culture of human rights," she says. "This way we contribute to the consolidation of peace, and build what this country has never had: a climate of confidence."

It is a climate that will be particularly important one year from now, as Salvadorans enter the home stretch of the campaign for national elections in March 1994. They will be



Peter Taylor / UNDP

A new civilian police force is trained at a UNDP-supported academy in San Salvador.

grand-slam elections of a kind never seen before in the country, where balloting for national and local slates usually takes place in different years; instead, this time all offices from president, to national assembly deputies, to mayors of the smallest municipalities, will be up for grabs at once.

"We'll never have the same circumstances again in our history," says Luis Arturo Zaldivar, president of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, the new voting authority mandated in the peace accords. That is not only because so many offices will be decided, but also because the elections come after years — one might say decades — of inevitably doomed attempts at installing democracy in the midst of conflict and corruption.

Whoever becomes president needs utmost legitimacy, because he will need to conduct nothing less than the healing of a nation, to prevent a return to the cycle of violence. "We have to ensure people know that whoever wins, won clean, and who loses, lost clean," says Mr. Zaldivar.

Again, the race is against time. In many cases, local records used for voting lists were burned in attacks on municipal buildings in rural towns. Massive dislocation has occurred from a countryside under fire to the misery belts around provincial capitals and San Salvador. Experience has created serious popular doubt about the worth of any elections at all.

But the new Tribunal says it is moving to guarantee a crystal-pure vote. Five international experts brought in by UNDP worked with the Tribunal to formulate common sense, simple suggestions to build voter participation and prevent fraud. Mr. Zaldivar is contracting out a key public information campaign to motivate widespread voting. And well before the balloting, the Tribunal plans to publish registration lists not once but three times, the first two subject to correction by citizens themselves, so everyone eligible might receive a voting card to participate in the event. The months are passing quickly, and the stakes are high. Mr. Zaldivar puts it this way: "The elections are going to be the ultimate test of fire: do the peace accords work, or not?"

For most Salvadorans, however, the ultimate test of peace as an everyday affair is more likely to be the attitude shown toward them by the authorities, especially the police. The accords call for dissolution of old corps and the creation of a new National Civilian Police, which is viewed here as key to ending the stultifying militarization of society. The idea is that security forces must no longer be repressive, treating civilians as though they were mixed up with subversives. Instead, police should stand alongside citizens, to protect them. It will take Salvadorans a tremendous leap of faith to believe it.

"Besides producing a new kind of police, the idea is to reconcile and unite, to be a place where those of different factions integrate and thus present an example for society."

For years National Police headquarters were used to detain, torture and interrogate the arrested before they were sent to prison. Squads making arrests regularly violated norms which required that they identify themselves, and be uniformed. Interviews over the years with their victims, and reports by church and international human rights investigators, reveal an ugly, consistent list of methods security forces used to extract information.

"We are starting from zero, to instruct recruits that they answer totally and before all else to human rights, assume the principles of democracy, and demonstrate absolute respect for the liber-

ties and rights of citizens," says Alfredo Carballo, director of studies of the new National Public Security Academy. "Once they understand this, we teach them the rest."

Mr. Carballo, who is Spanish, is one of 30 instructors and administrators chosen internationally to ensure objectivity and a break with the past. Among the student body – 330 entering each month until a corps of 6,000 is created in two years – are former guerrillas, soldiers and police; young workers and students who have never carried a gun; and, for the first time, women. As they drill to cadence marked by a Chilean officer, they all wear the same blue twill and share expressions of intense concentration. It is impossible, certainly, to pick out who has been who. The order of march, as Mr. Carballo says drily, "is alphabetical."

"Besides producing a new kind of police, the idea is to reconcile and unite, to be a place where those of different factions integrate and thus present an example for society," says the El Salvadoran director of the Academy, Mario José Bolaños.

In an attempt at balance, fixed quotas of qualifying recruits are accepted from among former government and rebel groups, as well as from among civilians. It is likely those representing the perspective of the FMLN may slightly outnumber the others, given that pro-rebel "popular organizations" have encouraged their civilian cadre to apply. Yet once accepted, ideology appears to take a back seat; not even minor political arguments have been reported, as candidates scramble to maintain the discipline of classes and physical training.

Instructors report motivation is high. I watch candidates in classrooms huddled over books, and think back to a hot, metal-roofed building at the rebel concentration near Suchitoto. There, would-be candidates with limited formal education struggled to master basics that would allow them to graduate ninth grade, and make them eligible to apply to the police academy.

"We have a commitment to change society now in a different way," said a 25-year-old at the camp named Julio. "The way I understand the work of the police, most of it is not simply to act when violence occurs, but to prevent it." Julio pointed to where fellow police hopefuls had painted "Ten Commandments": Honour human rights in all things, Honour the laws of the nation, Thou shalt not identify with any political party, Thou shalt not torture....

"We don't have experience at creating a police academy, but yes, we have experience at evaluating projects and marshalling resources," says UNDP Deputy Resident Representative Bruno Moro, while explaining the first-time effort.

Behind his desk on academy grounds, Mr. Bolaños, a former corporate lawyer, looks at his own lack of experience in the world of police and politics as a mixed blessing. The accords stipulate the director must be someone politically neutral, of integrity, agreed upon by all parties, with no ties to former police. Yet the position is undeniably political. The national press, with their lights and microphones, have just left, after grilling Mr. Bolaños on FMLN complaints about favouritism, which he eloquently denied. Pledged money is so slow in arriving that the year's $21 million budget is $17 million short, while the director nevertheless must keep training deadlines and pay bills: in a poor country, the academy provides everything, down to the candidates' underwear. Now Mr. Bolaños, with the pale look of one who is bearing the last straw, opens a drawer and hands me a tape cassette, which he says he recorded from his answering machine at home a few days before.

When I play it later I can hear several calls, in which a deep voice menaces: "Watch out for your children. Quit." Each time, an extended crackling burst follows, like automatic weapons fire. Mr. Bolaños takes the calls as a warning; someone doesn't want the academy to succeed. "I felt an internal commitment to President Alfredo Cristiani to take this job when he asked me," he says. "But I'm finding the academy is the object of political pressures, and now this...."

When we watched the first hard signs of El Mozote's agony appear out of the dirt, a sense of resolution, of healing and not of settling scores, seemed to be in the air.

What Mr. Bolaños is articulating, in his office in San Salvador, echoes in its way the caution I heard from Martín, the guerrilla *responsable* at the rebel camp near Suchitoto. Salvadorans see that changes around them are proving slow to complete, despite creative accords and technical aid of unprecedented reach, and for now they embrace peace with only the most guarded joy.

Peter Taylor / UNDP

A memorial at El Mozote remembers the dead at the site of a 1980 massacre.

Five hours from San Salvador, in the high northeastern beak of the country that bites into Honduras, one can see so far that distant ranges look powdery blue and the base of San Marcos volcano disappears, its perfect cone left as if floating on air. Sometimes the winding road passes a *tatu*, a shelter dug into the red earth to protect those who reached it from aerial or artillery fire. Eventually the road penetrates some of the little remaining forest cover in this denuded land, great stands of pine where the air is cool.

Here in a town called El Zancudo (it means "the mosquito") the population is reeling from a World Court decision about their hills, one of seven *bolsones*, or pockets of land disputed for 23 years between El Salvador and Honduras. "We went to sleep on 10 September Salvadorans, and woke up on the eleventh Hondurans," laments one resident. Like others, he calls himself "Salvadoran for 500 years."

"If concerns from these areas, especially about land, are not resolved, they have the potential of becoming points of conflict," says Carlo Venturello. He is director of the Salvadoran component of PRODERE, a UNDP-supported programme for war-affected populations in Central America, which has health and planting projects here. This is territory of FMLN influence, where many peasants are terrified of Honduran authorities, whom they regard as accomplices of the Salvadoran Army. It wasn't foreseen in the accords, but now UNDP has taken on the delicate situation of the *bolsones* too, as part of its mandate to assist the peace process.

I remember what Walter Franco had said back in the capital about this border region: "It's going to be difficult anyway up there. But it might be much more difficult without our presence."

UNDP is suggesting a plan that might treat the *bolsones* and neighbouring populations as a special development area, perhaps even including dual nationality for those who want it. It is one more "new kind of project for the UN system," as Mr. Venturello says, this one including not only two governments, but a still-armed rebel opposition which holds sway in the mountains, not to mention the armies of both countries. In the best of cases, such a plan might show how borders could be bridged or even erased for the sake of integration, a long-time regional dream — some say an economic necessity; at the least, it aims to defuse a tinder-box.

From El Zancudo, descending again toward the Torola River, once a kind of unofficial dividing line between government and rebel-held territories, the landscape becomes gentler again, the roadside lush with wildflowers in yellow, deep purple and red. We have heard that a team of forensic anthropologists is investigating the site of a reported 1980 army massacre, at the village of El Mozote, not far out of our way. Later, as we watch alongside a local judge and a few volunteers, in a scientific atmosphere much like an archeological dig, an anthropologist brushes away dirt from a small, broken cranium as if it were a precious vase, found just a couple of feet below the surface.

In the following weeks the bones of dozens of women and children would be recovered.

But on that late afternoon when we watched the first hard signs of El Mozote's agony appear out of the dirt, a sense of resolution, of healing and not of settling scores, seemed to be in the air. The fact that the horrifying event might be investigated at all was a sign that something indeed had changed in this corner of El Salvador, and certainly was changing elsewhere, despite all the uncertain steps. The mud bricks of the ruined church walls lie about, melting back into the soil, but among the weeds the holy water font survived almost upright, because it had been made of stone. There was no sound but birds, and that of a shovel patiently breaking dirt. ■

Mary Jo McConahay is the Central America editor of the Pacific News Service.

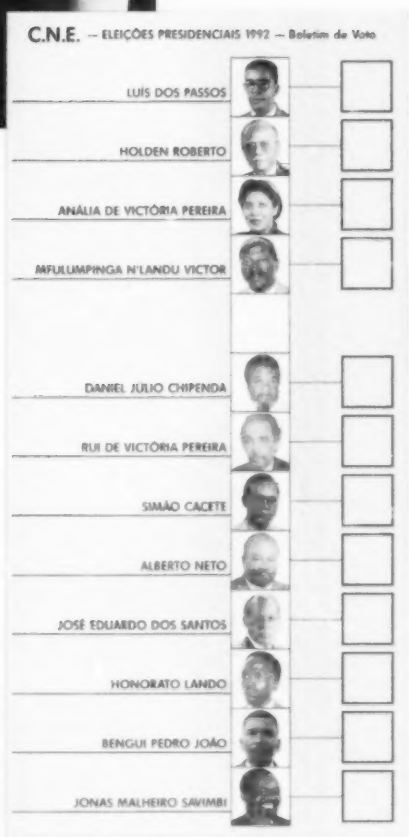
EFFORTS IN DEMOCRACY: ANGOLA'S UNEASY

BY BERTIL EGERÖ

Anyone who has watched events unfold in Haiti, Cambodia and now Angola knows that the road to secure peace takes a country through unchartered and volatile territory. In recent years, a number of countries have sought to put an end to bloodshed and civil strife by betting on democracy. But it is an uneasy proposition at best. A successful transition requires an ongoing commitment from all sides to give up arms in favour of reconciliation and political pluralism. Holding a national ballot, while in itself a pivotal event, is an important first step and test of that commitment. Yet we know too well that its outcome cannot be guaranteed. Following Angola's election last September, for example, renewed fighting broke out resulting in more than 1,200 casualties, threatening to throw the entire country back into the abyss of civil war.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANDERS GUNNARTZ

ELECTION



LEFT: WAITING TO VOTE IN THE TOWN OF LEUA IN MOXICO PROVINCE. ABOVE: AN ANGOLAN WOMAN CASTING HER BALLOT AT THE POLLING STATION IN LUMEGE. RIGHT: A PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION FORM: VOTING BY FINGERPRINT.

The rebel organization UNITA's unchallenged return to war resulted in a serious setback for democratic aspirations not only for Angola, but for other countries in the region. In countries such as Mozambique, the main lesson learned is that without a rigidly controlled disarmament of both sides, little may be gained from even the best election.

Organizing the Angolan election was a Herculean feat, requiring tremendous technical and logistical skills, not to mention financial resources. The entire effort cost an estimated US$80 million, out of which $23 million was contributed by foreign donors.

Bertil Egerö, who monitored the election as an international observer, gives a firsthand account of the event.

CHILDREN CARRYING POSTERS OF EDUARDO DOS SANTOS.

Luanda, Angola — To get to the voters is not easy in Angola. Imagine a country the size of France, Spain and two Portugals combined. Most of the estimated 12 million citizens live without access to modern media. Many roads are still mined, and most bridges destroyed. Still, the majority of the population needed to partake in the election if it was to have any viability at all.

Massive efforts were taken to teach people about the electoral process and prepare them for their participation as voters. But the best education campaign probably was the registration effort. Brigades of teachers and students were dispatched from urban areas to all accessible parts of the country. To prepare a voter identification card for every Angolan 18 years of age and older, they walked long distances, spending the night where the day ended. In this way, 4.9 million people were registered, out of an estimated 5.3 million eligible adults.

This marked what some hoped would be a new era for a country racked by 16 years of civil war. In rebel-controlled areas, covering around one-fifth of Angola, the appearance of registration teams from the government adminstration was a revelation to many villagers: something was happening that could lead to meaningful change.

When 29 September finally arrived, the desire for peace seemed immense. "I voted today because I believe this can give us one government only," said a wrinkled man who had just left the polling station. "And one government is what we must have to get peace."

The voting process itself was no small undertaking. More than 5,800 polling stations were distributed across the entire country. Each consisted of a large wooden box monitored by five election officers, who had travelled long distances to get there. All had a two-day food ration; the luckier ones were allotted a blanket. With

HELICOPTERS FANNED OUT ACROSS ANGOLA TO TRANSPORT CARGO, VOTERS AND ELECTION PERSONNEL.

them were observers from political parties invited to follow the voting firsthand.

Some 1,200 of these polling stations had to be delivered to areas inaccessible by road or surrounded by mines. Airborne transport was the only solution. But this too was fraught with obstacles. Airstrips as well were often mined or lacked landing lights, and control towers in Angola do not always function properly. Many hangars had been destroyed and fuel supplies looted.

Still, a giant air lift needed to be launched: the most extensive civilian helicopter operation in UN history. The main workhorse would be a fleet of 40 helicopters carrying vast quantities of cargo and thousands of people to and from polling stations.

Canadian logistics specialist Hank Morris, who had earlier worked in the Nicaraguan peace process and was on leave from El Salvador, was recruited to map out the operation. "Time was short, of course. When I arrived in June, the electoral commission had just started its work and could not yet define its needs," he said.

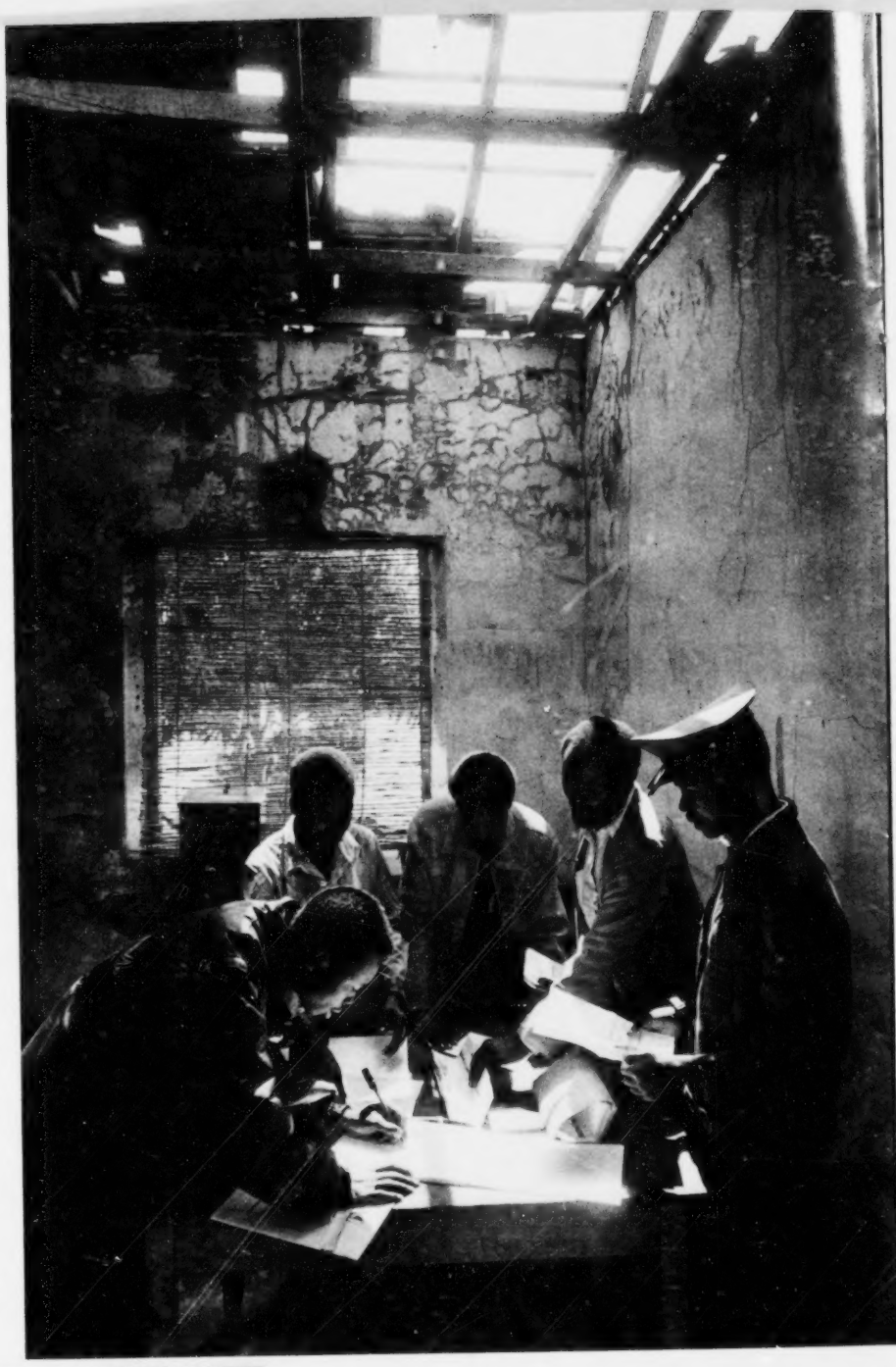
Unlike Namibia, where the UN was in charge of the entire process leading to independence, Angola is a sovereign nation. Four hundred UN peacekeepers under the auspices of UNAVEM II were there only to

bear witness and report on the election. Yet it was patently clear that Angolan authorities would be unable to do the entire job themselves. The United Nations again stepped in, this time through its development agency, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which provided logistical and technical support.

To pay for the air transport network, $10 million needed to be raised. Pledges rose, but not fast enough. As late as one month before the election, UNDP had succeeded in raising $5 million, about $1.2 million of which would help pay for air transport costs and the balance for other technical assistance – including election coordinators and experts in electoral registration, community education, communications and logistics. The tension lasted until the very last minute, when the plan finally came together. An air network was established that included one Antonov-26, three Hercules C-130, six lighter aircraft and 40 Russian M1-17 helicopters. Six main operational centres were established, from which the helicopters fanned out to every part of the country.

The operation was not without mishap. Three helicopters crashed in the period leading up to the election, each exactly one week apart. One crash occurred only three days before the election started, killing at least 15 persons. All helicopters had to be grounded for investigation amidst hectic last-minute deliveries of polling stations to their sites.

The counting of votes was done by the electoral officers at each station, with party representatives and electoral police serving as witnesses. The results were entered onto a special form and were delivered personally to the provincial capital by 5,800 electoral officers in charge of the polling stations. Once the data was received in Luanda by fax, it was fed into two independent computer networks, and the results cross-checked. Meanwhile, all the boxes with neatly packed ballots and other election material were stored in the provincial capitals, for future reference.



EXCITEMENT IN LUANDA BUILDS AS THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN DRAWS TO AN END.

Throughout the campaign, the collaboration between electoral officers and representatives of different political parties was

BALLOTS ARE COUNTED AT A POLLING STATION IN NINDA, MOXICO PROVINCE.

BOXES FILLED WITH ELECTION MATERIALS ARRIVE IN CHIUIME, MOXICO PROVINCE.

impressive. This cooperation, which crossed dividing lines, is the basis upon which national reconciliation can take hold.

Several days after the election, as the threat of war was building, Maria Lecticia Silva, an Angolan who led civic education drives, said: "Would you like to hear what we are dreaming about now? We dream of creating a fund for democracy, to enable us to build on the experience that the election was for all of us. It seems to me now, that ordinary Angolans understand democracy a good deal better than our political leaders."

When the final results were published, President Eduardo dos Santos had won the majority of votes, but with a fraction below the 50 per cent required for an outright victory. The law was clear on this point: a second electoral contest should be held between the two main candidates. But rebel leader Jonas Savimbi, unable to assume the democratic challenge, instead took the country to the brink of war.

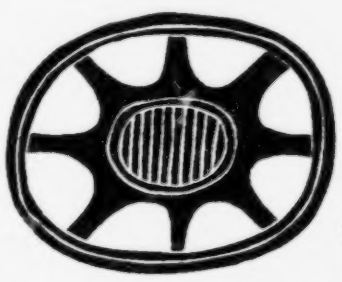
As we go to press, an uneasy calm reigns in the capital as efforts are being made to secure the peace and to corral Mr. Savimbi back into the democratic process. Much is at stake – not only for Angola but for future democracy in the region.■

Bertil Egerö directs a programme on population and development at the University of Lund in Sweden. He has a long-standing interest in Southern Africa.

Anders Gunnartz is a Swedish photographer who specializes in development.

VIEWPOINT

Reclaiming Africa's Democratic Roots



Africa has a strong and rich democratic tradition that has its roots at the village level. General Olusegun Obasanjo, a former Nigerian head of state, argues that reviving democratic values and improving the calibre of Africa's leadership will be critical to the continent's future development.

In recent years, democracy has become one of the three most commonly used words in discourse about Africa. Along with reform and adjustment, democracy, more than ever, has taken centre stage.

Democracy is not, by nature, perfect. No process of governance by organized and sustained popular consent can be. But neither is it alien to African societies. Contrary to belief in some quarters, the current wave of pro-democracy movements in Africa is essentially the awakening of a smouldering and long-suppressed tradition, with some prompting from new Western attitudes and from the democratic reforms of *perestroika*. In the past, democratic ideals have been fundamental values in African society. Consultation and consensus-building as part of our cultural heritage has a long and cherished tradition. An examination of the societies of the Karamojong of present-day Uganda, the Zulu of Southern Africa and the Asanti in Ghana, bear this out. It is therefore amusing when international friends talk and behave as if democracy is as alien in Africa as a three-piece suit in the Sahara.

Granted, there were tyrannical rulers and kings in Africa just as there were in Europe and Asia. However, for all intents and purposes, our forefathers practiced consensual politics in which they often agreed to disagree until they arrived at a common decision. And although individual rights were not specifically protected, promoted and defended, there was an emphasis on communal rights and responsibilities. Accountability was seen as a sacred and inviolable principle.

The political structure in most traditional African societies centred around the kings, chiefs and elders, who could be "destooled" if there were sufficient grounds. Providing advice was a "general assembly," defined by

Schomburg Center, New York Public Library

The King of Akim and his suite, *circa* 1890, in present-day Ghana.

lineage, age, or spiritual ranking, whose recommendations could only be overruled if they violated the best interests of the community, or the wishes of the gods or ancestral spirits. The assembly was obliged to discuss the dissenting view of any of its members. In the process, everyone learned about the need for give and take, about policy making, and about the weight that should be accorded to issues of the public good. There was no formal separation in the ranks of the political class into parties; there was no winner-takes-all doctrine or practice, for there was no winner and no formal opposition.

Women, while accorded special roles and responsibilities, were not allowed to participate in the deliberations of the general assembly. But they did have organizations and societies of their own through which they influenced decisions. If all else failed, history shows that they would demonstrate or riot, forcing even the most powerful rulers to abdicate the stool.

At the village level, the most important feature of African politics was the expectation of ensuring social justice for all. This was accomplished in three ways: through the distribution of land; through a welfare scheme embedded within the structure of the extended family; and through the obligation of the ruler to ensure that harvests were good, and that society was devoid of the scourges of epidemic disease and despotic behaviour. Anyone who needed land for cultivation could get it through the extended family or the community itself. Allowances were made for need, ability and rank. Cooperative arrangements were also in place for ensuring the fertility of the land, by allowing particular parcels to lie fallow for periods of up to seven years. During the farming season, the chief priest would offer prayers to the gods, asking them to bless the agricultural activity of the entire community and to make harvests bountiful for all. Intimately connected with the social ethics of land-holding was the family welfare scheme. The well-to-do were encouraged to help the relatively weaker members of their families.

Education was free, and was provided for all young people through tales by moonlight. In the evenings, youths would gather at the feet of their elders and hear stories illustrating the superiority of bravery, courage, high morality and public spiritedness over cowardice, timidity, low morality and self-centredness. Such stories served to raise the intellect of the young and to alert them to the need for resourcefulness and quick decision-making, especially in emergencies. It also engrained in them the values of their society.

Balancing Power in the Kingdom of the Zulus

The traditional society of the Zulu nation in Southern Africa, which dates back hundreds of years, was founded on a system of checks and balances.

At the helm of affairs was the king, who held the land in trust for his people and had ritualistic functions, medicinal powers and custody of important ancestral objects. His power was both supported and kept in check by a council of chiefs (*indunas*), including one who was the commander of the king's army and another, "the great *indunas*," who was prime minister.

The king was expected to follow the advice and counsel of the *indunas*. If he chose to ignore them, the council could seize at least one head of his cattle.

The prosperity of the Zulu nation was believed to depend on the wisdom of the council and the ability of the councillors to criticize fairly the decisions of the king. As a form of self-protection, the king was required to place issues before the council for discussion, after which he made his final decision. Nevertheless, the councillors were expected to defer to the king and express their criticisms not as strong opinions, but in diplomatic language. A wise king usually heeded the advice of the majority.

The king was the supreme court of the nation. He carried out this function with help from resident *indunas*, who were versed in law and logical reasoning and issued verdicts in the king's name. The king was required to uphold the laws of the land, but could also create new laws if and when the situation demanded it. When a decision aroused opposition, the king could save face by retracting his decision and insisting that his *indunas* had made the mistake without his knowledge and authority.

Only rarely did the king call a full meeting of the nation, since he kept himself informed of the public will through his council. If the king chose to be tyrannical, he stood a good chance of being poisoned by his close relatives, with the acquiescence of the people.

Within the tribes that made up the Zulu nation, the various chiefs were under the same moral code of governance. The members of a tribe could complain to the king if their chiefs became tyrannical or high-handed. They reserved the right to revolt against them, but were required beforehand to inform the king of their decision. **–O.O.**

It was the advent of colonial rule which undermined these democracies and their internal dynamism. The struggle against colonialism was, very profoundly, the struggle for democracy as much as it was a struggle for self-determination and majority rule.

With independence, most African countries were filled with optimism and hope because of what freedom represented to the African people. We had dreams of developing in quantum leaps and bounds now that we were again the masters of our own destinies.

But Africa at independence was — and still is — confronted with enormous structural and leadership problems. Countries which achieved independence through negotiation were handed a structure and a set of rulers that ensured that the former colonial power relationship would not be violently disrupted. Even those who achieved independence through wars of liberation found themselves under fierce economic and political constraints. Either they bent toward the West, and were absorbed into the neo-colonial relationship of the capitalist powers, or toward the East, succumbing to the imperialist network of the former Soviet Union.

Beyond the East-West tug-of-war, a second set of problems was internal, and remains central to the present crisis in Africa: the quality of national leadership. Most African leaders arrived at leadership positions ill-equipped and unprepared for the role their offices demanded of them. Neocolonialism, up to a point, can be blamed for the inadequate performance of African economies since independence. But the major responsibility for our present impasse must be placed squarely on the shoulders of Africa's leaders, who have in the main been inadequate, unimaginative, self-serving and in some cases less than upright. For the most part,they have been far removed from Africa's traditions of democracy.

Should we raise our hands in despair and give up? Of course not. The situation is reversible. History is replete with examples of the rise and fall of peoples, of nations, of kingdoms, of empires. What Africa needs today is new initiatives, new attitudes and a new orientation — inspired by its glorious past — to achieve effective political and economic restructuring and transformation of our societies. Responsive and effective governance is required to motivate economic growth, promote human development and, at the same time, revive the dwindling interest of the international community in Africa's development. But this can only be achieved in an atmosphere of peace, security and stability, which will have its foundation in democratic institutions.

In essence, this was the message of more than 500 heads of state and other officials from Africa and different parts of the world who met in Kampala, Uganda, at a Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation in Africa in May 1991.

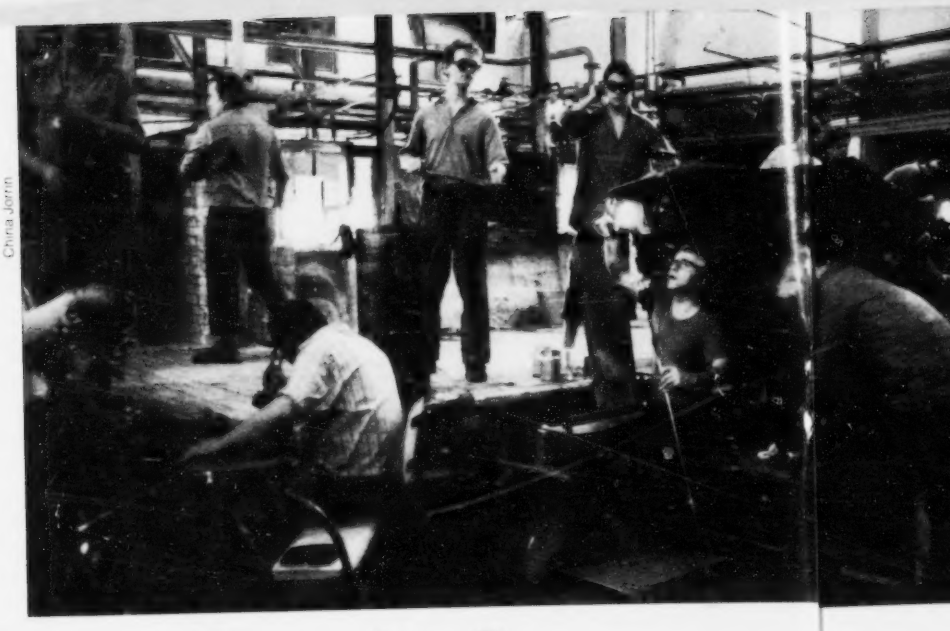
On the heels of this historic meeting was a follow-up conference in Cotonou, Benin, in October 1992. Organized by the Africa Leadership Forum, the conference focused specifically on how to develop the institutions necessary to underpin the ongoing process of Africa's democratization.

Peoples' movements, culminating in "National Conferences" or "National Democratic Forums," have arisen in a number of African countries as vehicles to transform the political system. In the process, many countries have already arranged free elections and overthrown repressive dictatorships. The overwhelming popular support for such movements has put political pluralism in the lexicon of everyday discourse in Africa and given renewed hope for the future.

Accountability was seen as a sacred and inviolable principle.

While the basic pillars of democracy are universal, its ingredients — what it encompasses and how it is composed and practised — will vary from country to country. It is thus important to recognize the democratic roots of African societies. We should not import democracy lock, stock and barrel. It must be home-grown, home-watered and home-sustained. And in this respect, Africa's soil is rich.■

Olusegun Obasanjo was a general in the Nigerian Army who became head of state in 1976. In 1979, he voluntarily organized democratic elections and transferred power to his newly elected successor. General Obasanjo is currently chairman of the Africa Leadership Forum, which receives support from UNDP.



China Jorrin

Privatization: Panacea or Broken Promise?

Alejandro Rausch, economic consultant to the Government of Argentina, UNDP and the World Bank:

"The Argentine experience shows that a privatization programme without strong state regulation is very risky business. An adequate legal and regulatory framework must be in place before the programme begins. If not, the result may be private monopolies with deteriorating standards and rising prices. Thought must also be given to the protection of strategic sectors and to situations where large numbers of workers are dismissed. The state has to form new policies to address these problems."

By Christopher McIntosh

For many economists and politicians in the 1980s, "privatization" was a magic word. Those were the heady days of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan's ascendancy, when a new era of private enterprise was expected to sweep the world, revitalizing the economies of both North and South. The events in Eastern Europe that began in 1989 appeared to confirm this hope. It seemed that everywhere the government role in industry was on the retreat, and that the future belonged to the private sector. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) was one of the international agencies that fully embraced this vision, creating a special division for the private sector and the Interregional Network on Privatization, which aims to assist countries in sharing information and experience in this field.

While the privatization effort is still very much alive, the high expectations of the 1980s are tempered by a new sense of realism. "The initial euphoria has worn off," says Philip Reynolds, a senior programme officer in UNDP. "Creative responses are now necessary to limit potential constraints and negative impacts and to help privatization programmes succeed."

Ironically, developments in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union have played a large part in this change of mood. After launching the privatization effort to loud cheers, the countries of the former socialist bloc soon found that the ship was in danger of running aground. John Howell, an economist with the US-based international consulting firm Ernst and Young, blames both Western experts for giving naively optimistic advice, and Eastern European politicians for rushing ahead with privatization for political reasons.

"In the euphoria of the initial political changes," says Mr. Howell, "neither Western advisers and investors, nor the governments and business communities of Central and Eastern Europe conceived of the size of the problems that needed to be overcome."

Obstacles to privatization are many. They include lack of a free market culture, confusion over who owns the enterprises and how much they are worth, poor physical infrastructures which discourage foreign investment, the absence of a legal framework governing the conduct of business, and shortage of investment capital. When privatization is actually implemented, the results can often lead to problems. For example, when a government sells a viable enterprise, the profits go to enrich investors, who tend to be wealthier than the average taxpayer. Thus income disparities are increased. Other consequences can include higher prices for basic goods and services, large-scale layoffs, loss of national assets to foreign buyers and the possible closure of vital

The recently privatized Pešta crystal factory in former Czechoslovakia.

industries. In a number of countries these effects have led to social unrest.

To examine these problems in depth, UNDP's division for global and interregional programmes called together a distinguished group of economists, politicians and development experts for a seminar at the Palais des Nations in Geneva last
It was attended by participants countries, including three of the European economies in transition: ner Czechoslovakia, Hungary and The theme was "Privatization: ints and Impacts."

gary was one of the countries that the new era most enthusiastically. 90 reopening of the Budapest stock ge was an exciting occasion: there peeches lauding the free market , followed by the dramatic moment he charter of the new exchange was down a long table to be signed by s, financiers and political dignitar- e of the first newly privatized com- to be floated on the new exchange e Hungarian national travel agency, Today, however, Ibusz shares are shing at below their original offer and the exchange has remained a peration with only 22 companies traded.

ısz was floated too early," explains av Bager, who attended the seminar ector general of economic policy in ungarian Ministry of Finance. "It was adequate shape at the time, and restructuring work should have been In addition, the tourist industry is ourishing at the moment because of cession."

other recent example of privatization ngary is the tobacco industry, but gain the results have been disap- ing. Foreign tobacco companies have d into the Hungarian market but been unwilling to invest in local

for the stock exchange, Mr. Bager ins that there is a lack of local capital for investment. For the same reason, most firms that turned into shareholding companies have seen their equity ownership remain in the hands of the State Property Agency. In general, while Hungary has made progress in the development of a market economy, the pace of privatization has been slower than intended.

The same is true in Poland, where a law initiating the privatization programme was passed in July 1990. One of the brightest candidates for transfer to private ownership at the time was the Ursus tractor factory, which had a good product and the prospect of doing well in world markets. Today Ursus, like many other Polish enterprises, is still being restructured and is not yet considered ready for privatization. In Poland, a major constraint has been widespread misunderstanding about the nature of a free market system. In the words of the Polish participant at the seminar, Jerzy Cieslik of Ernst and Young: "For many workers in Poland, the definition of capitalism is socialism plus more money. People want all the benefits of both systems." With rising unemployment, previously unknown in the country, disenchantment with privatization is spreading.

Mr. Cieslik also discussed restitution, a thorny problem in Poland as in other countries. What happens when the buyer of a state enterprise finds that there is a claim on it by the person who owned it before nationalization? In many countries the laws on this issue are hazy or non-existent. Mr. Cieslik reported that a debate is currently raging in the Polish Parliament on this matter. "Politicians are trying to address the questions of who has rights to reprivatized property, what criteria should be used in deciding claims, and how the property should actually change hands."

In contrast to Hungary and Poland, the privatization movement in the Czech and Slovak Republics remains buoyant. This is somewhat paradoxical, considering that before 1989 a massive 97 per cent of the Czechoslovak economy was state-controlled, whereas in both Hungary and Poland there was already a noticeable private sector.

"The privatization programme is very radical in its scope and methods," says Olivier Bouin, a French economist currently advising the Czech government on the programme.

In the Czech and Slovak Republics, 4,200 state-owned enterprises have been earmarked for privatization. To overcome the shortage of local capital and to give as many people as possible the chance to invest, the country embarked on a daring and ingenious voucher scheme. In the first stage, from October 1991 to February 1992, every adult citizen had the right to buy a book of 14 vouchers costing about one week's salary. Each voucher was

George Mbowe, chairman, Parastatal Sector Reform Commission, Tanzania:

"The Tanzanian government aims to reduce public sector share in the economy from 95 per cent to five per cent over the next five years. About 250 enterprises have been identified for privatization or commercialization. Since the announcement of the programme there has been some uneasiness about it. In the minds of many people, privatization connotes the sale of public assets to foreigners at give-away prices. The workers are concerned that the new owners may lay them off. It would have been better if the announcement of the policy had been preceded by an information campaign to educate people about privatization and to gain their support."

Protoplus / Sygma

worth between 100 and 1,000 points. These points could then be used to bid for shares in the firms to be privatized. Alternatively they could be used to buy into one of the investment privatization funds that have appeared. The scheme has been a popular success. By January 1992, 8.6 million people, three quarters of those eligible, had participated. It remains to be seen how the firms privatized under the voucher scheme will fare, but a good start has been made.

"Another unconventional feature of the scheme," explains Mr. Bouin, "is that each state-owned firm is asked to draft its own privatization strategy, containing details of output, profit, export performance and value of assets."

These plans, however, sometimes prove unreliable owing to lack of information about possible restitution claims and confusion about the current legal status of the company. Antiquated accounting methods are also a problem, as they are in many former centrally-planned economies. Accounting is so deficient in some cases that it is impossible to draw up balance sheets for interested buyers.

Many of the problems faced by Eastern and Central Europe have also been encountered by developing countries of the South. A case in point is Argentina, where privatization started on a small scale in 1983. In 1990, faced with a soaring deficit and massive losses from its public sector, the Argentine government accelerated the process, selling off some of its largest state-owned enterprises. These included the national telephone company, the national airline and the state railway system.

Economist Alejandro Rausch, an adviser to the Government of Argentina, the World Bank and UNDP, is highly critical of the programme so far. In both the airline and telephone company, he says, the results of privatization have been worsening services and higher prices. He attributes this to the near-monopoly situation in both cases and the lack of government regulation to monitor the industries after privatization and ensure adequate standards and services.

One emerging lesson is that governments must be willing to play a major role both during and after privatization. This is confirmed by the experience of the former German Democratic Republic, one of the few places in the old socialist bloc where large-scale privatization is being carried out on schedule. Since unification with the Federal Republic of Germany in October 1990, over 3,000 enterprises have been privatized by the Treuhandanstalt (often abbreviated Treuhand), the state fiduciary body charged with carrying out the operation.

"No other country ever privatized so many industrial enterprises in such a short time," asserts Dieter Bös, professor of economics at the University of Bonn. Professor Bös points out that Treuhand does not simply hand over a firm to the highest bidder and then forget about it. Prospective buyers are asked to produce a detailed business plan, including commitments to investment and to maintaining as many jobs as possible. These plans are subsequently monitored by Treuhand, and penalties can be levied for non-compliance.

Buyers are chosen carefully, with the wider interests of the region in mind. Treuhand has sold enterprises for as little as one German mark to avoid their falling into the hands of West German entrepreneurs who might want to simply buy up potential rivals and close down their production lines.

"In a post-privatization world, there is still plenty for government bureaucrats to do," says George Yarrow of Oxford University. Professor Yarrow has made a special study of the British privatization programme, which began in 1979 and is generally regarded as a success. "Since privatization, the amount of state regulation in Britain has increased rather than diminished."

Part of the role of government is to ensure that the overall environment is conducive to healthy development of private firms. Too often, the seeds of the private sector were planted in a soil that was unprepared. The legal infrastructure,

Jerzy Cieslik, partner in Ernst and Young and adviser to the Polish government on privatization:

"Privatization in Poland has been much more complex and difficult than originally envisaged when the privatization law was passed in July 1990. When the law came into effect there was no clear ideological orientation. Some important people saw it as simply a legal transformation of certain enterprises rather than a radical metamorphosis of the entire economy. The law calls for the transformation of enterprises from centrally controlled to market-driven, but builds in the maintenance of certain social goals, for example by requiring that companies offer 20 per cent of their equity to employees at preferential rates. This type of compromise has been confusing to employees and buyers alike."

Hungary's stock exchange in Budapest.

for example, is a key factor. A market economy requires laws governing contracts, financial institutions, foreign exchange, taxation and monopoly practices. The question of intellectual property is also important. Zahir Jamal of the World Intellectual Property Organization suggests that any team advising a government on privatization should include a good patents lawyer. The protection of patents, he points out, is essential to encourage local research and development.

Equally important is the physical infrastructure such as transport, telecommunications, electricity and water supply. If these are inadequate, it will be difficult to woo foreign capital for divestitures or joint ventures. "Foreign capital can choose where to go, and it prefers to go where the infrastructure is well developed," says Vemuri V. Ramanadham, a professor of economics and coordinator of UNDP's Interregional Network on Privatization.

Legal and physical infrastructure tends to be more conducive to privatization in the developed, market economies than in the developing countries or the economies in transition. Nevertheless, some very poor countries have had successes in their privatization programmes.

Despite one of the heaviest debt burdens in the world and high inflation, Guyana has so far carried out a relatively smooth privatization programme, with 56 per cent of its firms going to Guyanese buyers. Guyana is one of the few countries where privatization has not brought high job losses, mainly because of previously under-utilized capacities in the enterprises.

While there is clearly no single formula for success, the Geneva meeting proved that countries have much to gain by sharing their experiences in privatization. One participant who came away with many practical ideas was George Mbowe, chairman of Tanzania's Parastatal Sector Reform Commission.

"This meeting," he says, "has widened my vision and enabled me to identify areas where my technical team could benefit from training." In particular, he was interested in the Czechoslovak voucher scheme. "This is something I had read about, but never understood in detail before. It could be a way for Tanzania to involve citizens who could otherwise not afford to invest."

For any country embarking on the promising but uncertain path of privatization, there are clearly many calculations to be made and choices to consider. As Professor Ramanadham points out, privatization is not an end in itself, nor is divestiture the only option. There is a wide spectrum of possibilities, ranging from full privatization to the restructuring of an enterprise under state ownership. In the future, countries choosing the privatization route will have to define their goals clearly and learn from the process of trial and error that other countries have gone through.■

The report of the Geneva seminar, *Privatization: Constraints and Impacts*, as well as the *Guidelines on Privatization*, edited by Vemuri V. Ramanadham, can be obtained from Philip Reynolds, Division for Global and Interregional Programmes, United Nations Development Programme, One United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017, USA.

Christopher McIntosh is an information officer with UNDP in New York.

Carl B. Greenidge, former minister of finance in the Government of Guyana:

"Privatization has been a crucial element of Guyana's Economic Recovery Programme, which has been under way since 1989. The privatization effort got off to a slow start, but picked up momentum and is now ahead of schedule. Nineteen enterprises have been either fully or partially privatized. Notwithstanding this success, the experience of Guyana suggests that as far as possible privatization should not be pursued in a situation of economic crisis. Now that the worst of the crisis is behind us, it will be interesting to see how privatization fares in the next phase."

Brian Randall / UNDP

Yemen's New Page in History

By I. Rajeswary

After hundreds of years of division, North and South Yemen are celebrating their unification while looking forward to an era of democracy and new opportunities. But many in this young republic have already learned that merging different political, economic and cultural systems is easier said than done.

Sana'a, Republic of Yemen – After centuries of division brought on by rivalling Islamic leaders, and later reinforced by British and Turkish colonial administration, North and South Yemen united to become one republic on 22 May 1990. In this ancient and majestic land, with its rugged mountains and bedrock traditions, unification ushered in a momentous era of opportunity and change.

Tourists now flock to Sana'a, once one of the most isolated places on earth, bringing with them precious foreign exchange. The lifting of travel restrictions between the former North and South Yemen has

Mountains in the interior of the former North Yemen reach 3,700 metres above sea level.

made family reunions possible all over the country. Greater press freedom has resulted in a proliferation of newspapers with divergent views. These changes are especially significant in the North, which was ruled for centuries by autocratic *imams*, and which opened its doors to the outside world only in the early 1970s. The South had the benefit of a liberal regime under the British, who ruled from 1839 to 1967.

For most Yemenis, unification is a dream come true. "Living in a homeland divided is a painful experience, and makes you feel torn apart," says Abdulaziz Al-Mekaleh, a renowned Yemeni poet and president of the Yemeni Centre for Studies and Research at Sana'a University. "Unification is the coming together of two halves. I feel a whole person now."

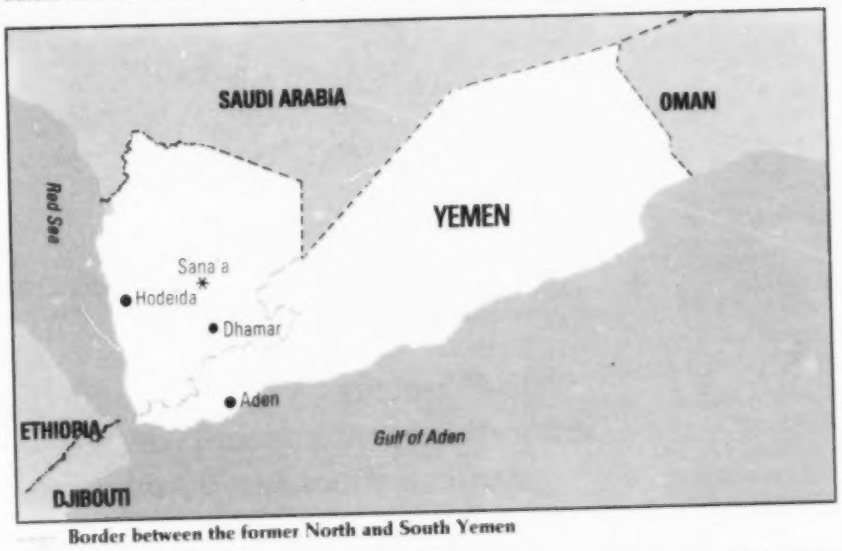
While unification kindled Mr. Al-Mekaleh's creative spirit, for farmer Masuada Mohamed Hamran, it simply meant a chance to make more money. Her sprawling farm, an hour's drive from Sana'a, the capital of what was once North Yemen, is lush with peaches, succulent grapes, sorghum and wheat. Already, her harvests draw over US$20,000 a year. "There is now a larger market for my fruits and vegetables," she says.

But not every Yemeni farmer is as pleased. "*Mafish...mafish*," ("finished") says Hilma Muhammed, of the former South Yemen, as she stares vacantly at the acres of barren land near her home in the Abyan governorate. Five months ago, her farm was flourishing with healthy green legumes and plants for animal fodder. "What is the point of unification?" she asks, her voice rising shrilly. "I had a happy life. Now I have nothing. The government gave us land and now has taken it away."

Until two years ago, South Yemen, or the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, was the only Marxist Arab state in the world. Under the old system, land here was nationalized after the British left and distributed to farmers.

Since unification, all nationalized properties are being returned to the original owners. Under an agreement worked out between farmers and landowners, a farmer is allowed to continue working the land while waiting for an alternative site from the government. "In most cases, peaceful exchanges have taken place," explains Abdulla Saeed Abaddan, deputy minister of planning and development in Aden. "But in some instances, there have been problems."

Unification of the two Yemens has been a goal since the 1970s, after both countries had battled internal strife and border wars with each other and with their neighbours. A draft Constitution for a unified state was signed in 1981 between President Ali Abdullah Saleh of the northern Yemen Arab Republic and President Ali Salem Al-Baid of the South. They envi-



Border between the former North and South Yemen

Republic of Yemen

Life expectancy at birth, 1990 (years)	51.5
Educational attainment, 1990:	
Adult literacy rate (%)	38.6
Mean years of schooling	0.8
Real GDP per capita, 1989 (purchasing power in US$)	1,560
Human Development Index rank (among 160 countries)	130

Source: 1992 Human Development Report

I. Rajeswary / UNDP

Women are the primary agricultural workers in Yemen.

sioned a mixed economy blending elements of socialist and capitalist models, a political system of parliamentary democracy, Islam as the official religion, and Sana'a as the capital.

But ideological differences, as well as conflicting interests of Saudi Arabia and the former Soviet Union, which backed North and South Yemen respectively, made a union seem impossible. It wasn't until the end of the Cold War and the fall of the Berlin Wall that Yemeni unification became realistic.

"It is not easy to merge two different political systems," Mr. Abaddan says. "That is why the two former governments agreed to a two-year period of transition."

The transitional government is a coalition composed of leaders from the General People's Congress of the North and the Yemeni Socialist Party of the South. A specific code, together with a new Constitution, form the legal framework under which it operates. The accord sets the requirements for the merger, provides for a multi-party system of governance and specifies that elections be held on 27 April 1993.

A new Parliament, which also includes lawmakers from both North and South, has been deliberating and approving legislation to speed the unification process. Laws to establish a central bank and common exchange rate, to promote investment and to unify the education system are being enacted. "Things *are* happening," says Mr. Abaddan, "but perhaps too slowly for some."

While dealing with the painstaking details of unification, Yemenis are also racing to make up for lost time. In the city of Sana'a, founded 2,000 years ago, people zip through chaotic traffic in their Toyotas and Land Cruisers, furiously honking their horns. Youngsters, dressed in scruffy denim jeans and traditional white robes, dash recklessly across busy streets, selling newspapers to motorists braking at stop lights. Veiled women, drenched in "Opium" perfume imported from France, haggle over jewellery in goldsmiths' stores. In coffee shops and restaurants, Yemenis engage in lively discussion over tea laced with mint or while chewing *qat* – a mildly stimulating narcotic leaf – or sometimes over mobile phones.

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Many Yemenis say they are euphoric over what unification has spawned. There are now 69 political parties, including a few that were once underground, and nearly 170 Arabic newspapers, many of which are openly critical of the government.

The new Parliament has 12 women members who come from the former South Yemen, where women go unveiled due to liberal social reforms. All parliamentary debates and proceedings are telecast live on the government-owned television network, much to the horror of Yemen's conservative neighbours – especially Saudi Arabia – whose citizens can now tune in to watch.

In another dramatic shift from the past, travel between the former divided countries is now thriving, and tourists in increasing numbers are journeying to Yemen to enjoy its spectacular mountain landscapes, exquisite mud-brick architecture and traditional hospitality. To this day, Yemeni men wear traditional *Qamis* (long white robes) with their often elaborate *jambiyas* (curved daggers) tucked in special belts slung at the waist – a reminder of a culture preserved for more than a millennium.

While many here remain optimistic about Yemen's future, the road to development is anything but easy. One of the headaches resulting from unification has been the merger of two different civil services, resulting in a bloated bureaucracy.

"It has not only affected our work," says Mr. Abaddan, "but also the development of the country." Final approvals on government and international projects, which previously took two days, for example, now take at least a week.

Reforming administrative structures and procedures has therefore become a crucial part of the United Nations Development Programme's assistance to the new republic. A total of $42.5 million in UNDP funds has been earmarked for a Yemen country programme that began in 1992 and runs through 1996.

In addition to bureaucratic bottlenecks, some cite lack of accountability as a hindrance to change. Punctuality is treated lightly among civil servants, and government vehicles are often used for personal rendezvous.

The former North Yemen has always had stringent laws and quotas for Yemenis and expatriates regarding the import of cars, equipment, building materials and alcohol, which are now being enforced throughout the republic. "People

A New Day for Yemeni Women?

Sana'a, Republic of Yemen – When the two Yemens merged in May 1990, many women in the former North Yemen rejoiced. They believed that the changes that accompanied unification would translate into greater social freedom and better education and job opportunities. In trying to transform their lives they thought they could draw courage from women in the South and break the shackles of a traditional and conservative society.

To their dismay, the opposite seemed true, as women in the South began covering their hair, arms and legs. According to government officials in Aden, the move towards conservative dress is largely due to the spread of Islamic fundamentalism. But women here say there is another important reason. "The cloak and veil enable us to keep a social distance and to protect ourselves from men," says one woman, dressed in the traditional garb.

Throughout Yemen, and especially in Sana'a, the debate rages on over the wearing of the veil. "The problem is that women don't want to take a risk," says Abdulaziz Saqqaf. "Until they simply take the veil off, the fight will be only marginal."

But it is not only women who pay the price when they defy society, as Raufa Hassan found out 20 years ago as an anchorwoman on the government-owned television station. One evening, just before reading the news, she decided to remove her veil. "It shocked the country and caused an uproar. My parents, especially my father, who is an Islamic judge, were criticized. But I paved the way for my sisters to follow," says Ms. Hassan, who today heads the mass media department at Sana'a University.

Ms. Hassan now wears long skirts that show a bit of ankle and baggy blouses, but she covers her hair. "That was a compromise on my part," she says. Women like Ms. Hassan, who holds a doctorate in development communications from a French university, are regarded with some apprehension in Yemeni society. "Yemeni men like dependent and semi-educated wives," says Mr. Saqqaf, "because they will not talk back in an argument or make decisions on their own. It is also easier to divorce an uneducated woman."

Brian Randall / UNDP

Education is key in improving the status of Yemeni women.

Under Islamic law, a man is permitted to have four wives and has the unilateral right to divorce. In the former South Yemen, polygamy was forbidden, except under certain conditions. This rule has now been incorporated into a new Family Law for the unified Yemen, which was recently approved by Parliament. There is now a minimum age for marriages – 15 for females and 18 for males. Previously, girls could be married off at the early age of nine.

While the new Family Law is considered a major accomplishment, enforcing it is another matter. Toward this end, the Yemeni Women's Union – a popular women's organization active in both the North and South – is determined to make women aware of their rights, promote education and raise health and nutrition standards. Radiah Shamsher Ali, a member of the executive branch in Aden, recently met with her counterpart in Sana'a to work out details of consolidating the two groups.

Women in the South were able to improve their status more easily because of educational opportunities under British rule, which were maintained by the subsequent socialist regime. It is because of this that Faezah Abdul Rakeeb, 33, was able to pursue electrical engineering at the University of Aden and become the city's first woman graduate in the field.

With unification, Ms. Rakeeb was transferred to Sana'a to help modernize the electronics division of the national radio and television corporation. "It was a culture shock for me," she says, "to witness the segregation between men and women here. It felt like Aden in the 1940s."

While some expect that change will come fast, others point out the deeply ingrained nature of attitudes and beliefs. "Unless women are educated," says Hedia Belhadj-El Ghouayel, country director of the UN Population Fund in Yemen, "it will be difficult to effect change."

According to government estimates, school enrollment for six-to-11-year-old girls in northern governorates is only 20 per cent, compared to about 85 per cent for boys. The good news is that this year's budget for education will double. "That alone is not enough," says Ms. Belhadj, a Tunisian. "First, women must want to do something for themselves. The mental revolution starts there." **– I.R.**

As of November, 70,000 refugees fleeing civil war in Africa had found temporary haven in Yemen.

I. Rapesbary / UNDP

always try to circumvent such laws to bring goods into the country," says Asma Basha, a lawyer and general director of legal affairs in the Ministry of Planning and Development. "If we want unification to work," she says, "people must adhere to the law."

But not all laws are necessarily furthering the cause of unification. Islamic tenets propagated by Muslim fundamentalists are causing concern among some citizens and government leaders who fear a widening of the already large differences between the two former states. Several women recently abandoned their farms in Wadi Zabid, near Hodeida in the former North Yemen, for example, because of fundamentalist teachings that prohibit Muslim women from working alongside men.

In the former South Yemen, the spread of fundamentalism is forcing women to don veils when in the past they did not. An annoyed Mr. Abaddan says his Ministry of Planning and Development in Aden has lost some of its best women employees as a result of what many here consider to be narrow interpretations of Islam.

The ministry is banking on education to bring a new wave of thinking to change such attitudes. One plan proposes adding more Yemeni women teachers so that parents feel comfortable about sending their daughters to school.

But the challenges facing this new republic far exceed cultural and religious differences. One of the oldest inhabited regions on earth, Yemen is also one of the world's least developed countries. With a population of over 12 million, it is the most populous country in the Arabian peninsula and has the world's sixth lowest nutritional level. Its infant mortality rate – a sensitive indicator of a nation's overall development – is high at 114 per 1,000 live births, according to 1990 estimates.

Due to a strong agriculture sector, the North enjoyed a high degree of self-sufficiency in food production until the early 1970s, when the situation deteriorated quickly due to rapid population growth and drought. Agriculture was also an important economic activity in the South, even though only two per cent of the land is arable. Food imports for the new republic are now growing and currently account for 70 per cent of total imports.

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The country's economic and social problems were further aggravated by the Gulf Crisis at the end of 1990, when more than 800,000 Yemenis were kicked out of Saudi Arabia and other neighbouring countries because of Yemen's position toward Iraq. According to UN estimates, the net cost to Yemen was over $2 billion, mainly in the loss of remittances and aid from the Gulf States and other donors. "We are being punished," says Mr. Abaddan, "because people did not understand our position during the Gulf War."

Yemenis blame inaccurate reporting on the part of the Western media for the backlash following the war. "Yemen was the first country to go on record on 3 August 1990 to condemn Iraq's invasion of Kuwait," says Mr. Abaddan, "but not many people know this." He says Yemen also called for a negotiated settlement between Iraq and Kuwait, preferably within the Arab fold. "So, when the US-led allied forces wanted to attack Iraq, an Arab country," he says, "the government and the people could not support that. It was a matter of principle."

Holding on to that principle cost Yemen dearly. Donor countries pulled out, and Yemen lost about $42 million a year in aid. In Dhamar, 100 kilometres south of Sana'a, work on a hospital halted abruptly when Kuwait withdrew its funds. In many parts of the country, construction of schools and roads came to a standstill as Arab financing dried up.

Moreover, returning migrants were in dire need of food, shelter and jobs. The unemployment rate rose from 14 to 36 per cent. Inflation hit an all time high of 70 per cent.

While struggling to absorb its own returnees, Yemen was also forced to confront a flood of refugees fleeing civil wars in Africa. In early July, for instance, a cargo vessel from Somalia bearing 3,500 bone-thin Somali men, women and children was allowed to land on Aden beach. The government has agreed to give the UN High Commissioner for Refugees a plot of land to build a permanent camp for them. As of November 1992, some 70,000 refugees were in Yemen.

For months, unification took a back seat as the government grappled with problems created by the influx of returnees. "We were well aware that reform efforts would be compromised if we devoted too much time to solving problems caused by the Gulf Crisis," says Mutahar El Saeedi, vice minister of planning and development in Sana'a. "So, we decided to make unification reforms the top priority while also coping with our other difficulties."

While angered by the mistreatment of Yemenis over the Gulf Crisis, some here

also say they experienced a sense of liberation. "It disassociated us a little from Saudi Arabia," says Abdulaziz Saqqaf, editor-in-chief of the *Yemen Times*, an English-language weekly newspaper.

According to Mr. Saqqaf, Saudi Arabia has always regarded Yemen as its backyard, tapping the country for manual labour. Saudi Arabia also gave Yemen a substantial amount of aid. "Suddenly, they kick us out and stop their funding. They expected Yemen to collapse. Instead, we established a multi-party system and are about to go to the polls," says Mr. Saqqaf, who is also an economic adviser to the government.

While aid from Saudi Arabia has yet to resume, many Yemenis believe that the future lies in cooperation and friendship between the two countries. "We have no desire to force anything on anybody," says Mr. Saeedi. "We think democracy is our destiny and we are doing what is best for us."

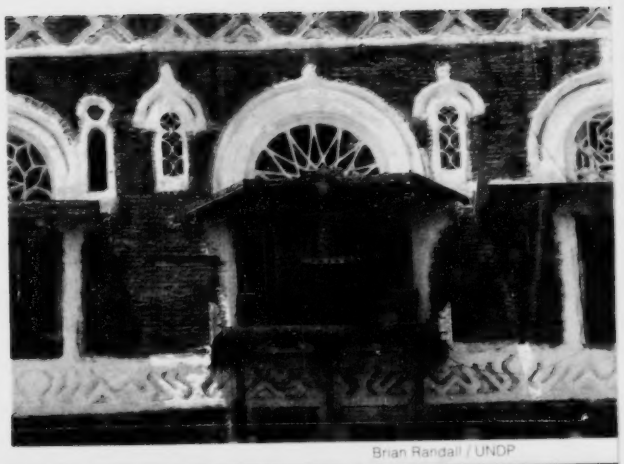
It was in the spirit of renewed cooperation that the government of Yemen worked with UNDP in preparing for its first Round Table Conference, held in Geneva from 30 June to 1 July last year. The conference sought to entice donors back and attract investors to Yemen. Sixteen donor countries and 12 international and regional organizations participated.

UNDP was the first and only international organization to begin working in the former North Yemen in 1968, at a time when there was only one asphalt road and hardly a drop of clean, safe drinking water. But in the last 25 years, change has happened quickly as modern highways now link major cities and towns, and electric grids bring power to all parts of the country. Unification has sped progress, creating a construction boom of residential and commercial buildings.

"While the whole world is dealing with countries that are coming apart, we in Yemen are dealing with a country that is united," says Awni Al-Ani, UNDP's resident representative in Yemen. "It is truly unusual and very challenging."

With elections approaching, the mood in Sana'a remains one of excitement. The new government machinery continues to run smoothly. Two incidents, however, have alarmed Yemeni leaders and threatened to disrupt the process: an assassination last June and an attempted assassination earlier in April. The targetted victims belonged to the Yemeni Socialist Party. The violence provoked a public outcry and stinging editorials in local newspapers.

Facade of traditional multi-storied mud-brick dwellings in Sana'a.



Brian Randall / UNDP

The market in Sana'a, capital of the new republic.

Richard Bickel / Black Star

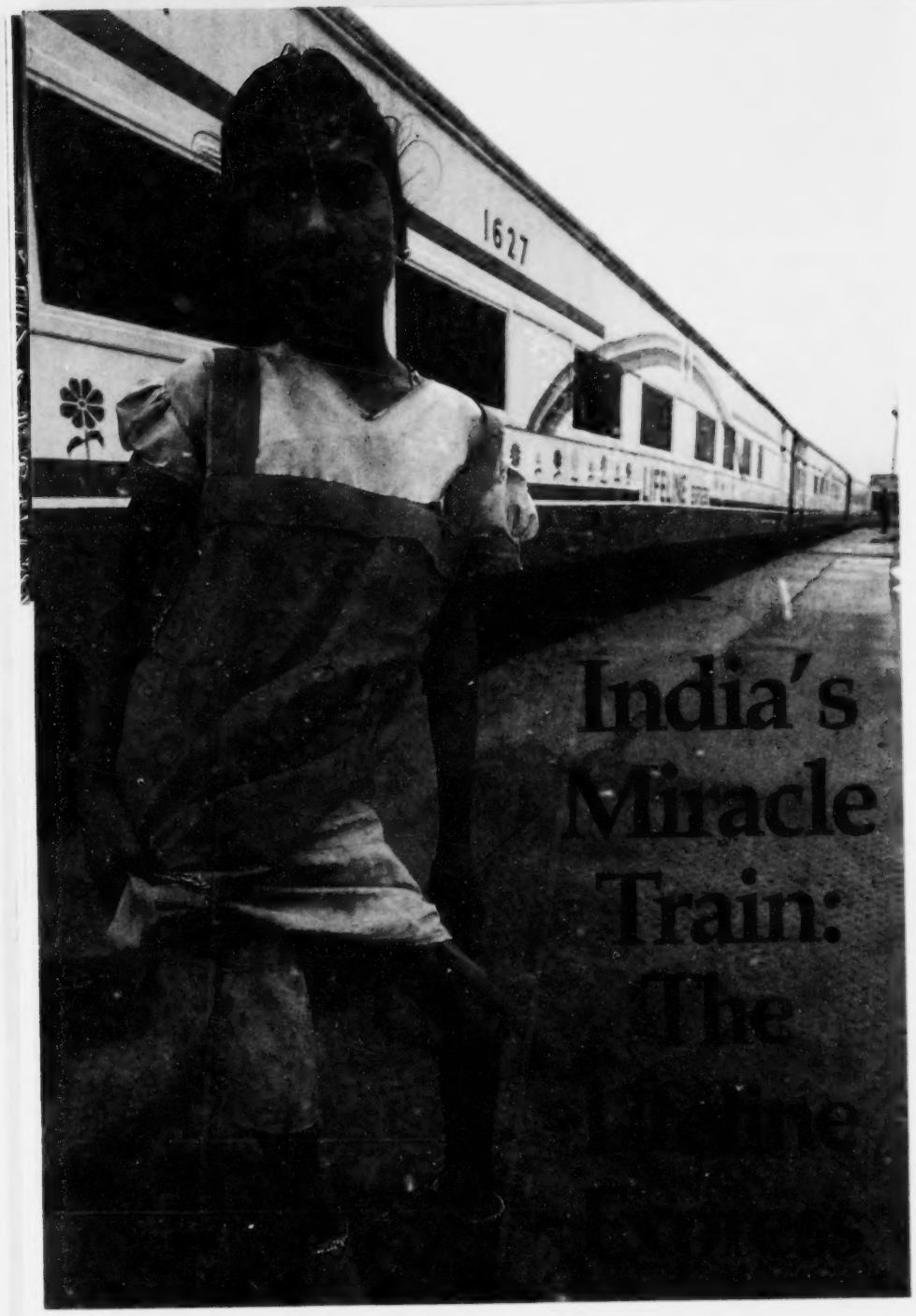
"These attacks are by people who are against the party's way of thinking," alleges Garallah Omar, 49, head of the socialist party's political wing. "They are trying to make us respond in the same way, but we will not fall prey to their bait. We want this democracy to work."

More recently, a car bomb exploded in Sana'a and a blast ripped through a room where cabinet meetings are held.

Many Yemenis fear that other tragic incidents may yet occur, jeopardizing the prospects for change that unification and democracy have brought.

Nonetheless, the country's experiment in democracy is moving forward and is watched with keen interest by Yemen's Arab neighbours. "Time brought about unification and multi-partyism. Individuals come and go. But time is like a river, always going forward and never going back," says Mr. Al-Mekaleh. A successful democratic transition in Yemen could well create a ripple throughout the Arab world. ■

I. Rajeswary is an information officer with UNDP in New York.



India's Miracle Train: The

By Gajra and Sailesh Kottary

Manmad, India — The 10-day long festival of Ganesh Chaturthi is one of the most popular religious festivals in western India, a time when the elephant-headed Lord Ganesh, or "Remover of Obstacles," is worshipped in Hindu households. This year, in the small railway township of Manmad, 300 kilometres northeast of Bombay, the festival took on more than symbolic significance. It coincided with the arrival of the long-awaited Lifeline Express, India's well-known hospital on wheels.

Residents of Manmad, who number about 200,000 and who are mainly engaged in small trades and in the cultivation of grapes and onions, saw the arrival of the hospital train on this rainy September day as nothing less than an act of God. They worshipped their favourite deity and waved colourful cutouts of the train that is bringing the promise of a new life to many of India's rural poor.

The Lifeline Express, a small mobile hospital chugging along India's rails, is made up of three 20-year-old first class coaches donated by Indian Railways and refurbished according to a design adapted from a British Army ambulance train. In the past year, it has set up camp at four different remote locations along the country's extensive rail network, the second largest in the world. These camps have been in eastern India; at Khalari and Chainpur in the state of Bihar; and at Farah and Gauriganj in the state of Uttar Pradesh.

Stopping at each of these camps for 45 days, the Lifeline Express brings medical experts from the nearest cities to treat people who suffer from polio and from eye and ear disorders. These specialists, some of whom have been trained abroad and include India's highest paid surgeons, offer their services free of charge, helping to make possible these "missions of hope."

"We treat patients who may never before have met a doctor, and where a surgical procedure will change the life of a child," says Surendra S. Kothari, an ortho-

Photos by Sara Brezinsky

A technician from Bhopal finds a moment's rest amidst a daily schedule of 30 to 40 operations a day.

paedic surgeon who is volunteering on the project. "It provides a sense of fulfillment that does not come easily in a comfortable private practice in Bombay."

The Lifeline Express is the brainchild of the IMPACT India Foundation and is promoted by the Government of India and three UN agencies, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNICEF and the World Health Organization. IMPACT India is part of a worldwide non-governmental organization dedicated to preventing avoidable disability. Local sponsors in India – which are usually large public corporations or government-owned enterprises – also play a pivotal role in the programme as they underwrite much of the initiative's costs. At Manmad, for example, Bharat Petroleum, a government-owned petroleum company, covered the expenses of the Lifeline Express during the 45 days it was stationed there.

As in most developing countries, many of India's rural dwellers are too poor to contemplate travelling to a large city for medical care. While India has an extensive primary health care network, most villagers are not inclined to use local centres in times of need as the quality of the care available is often not very high.

And so they came in the hundreds to Manmad on the afternoon of 1 September, seeking what for many would be a miraculous cure, and to take part in the festive inaugural ceremony. Some of the spectators were curious onlookers, but the majority were parents with polio-stricken children in tow who had trudged tens of kilometres in bad weather to get there. A number were scheduled for screening as soon as the very next day. They came from five rural communites located within a 50-mile radius of Manmad. On the next day, nine-year-old Sajid Ayub Qureshi, who journeyed from Kopargaon, limped bravely onto the train with a smile of hope lifting his face. He paused while touching the train almost reverentially. "Will I be able to walk again?" he asked his father excitedly, who nodded back with an affirmative smile.

"We treat patients who may never before have met a doctor, and where a surgical procedure will change the life of a child."

Eight-year-old Mangalbai Namdeo Rathore is operated on to restore use of her left leg.

Sajid is the fifth of seven children whose parents were unaware of the existence of a polio vaccine until he was already afflicted at the early age of one. Subsequently, all the other children were immunized against the crippling disease.

Sajid's story is replicated in the cases of Bharatbai Bajirao and Nandabai Valmiki, two young boys who came brightly attired in the tribal gear of their native village of Savargaon, 40 kilometres away. Santosh Ambadas Vithabe, seven, who also suffers from polio, is another case where one dose of the polio vaccine was not followed through by the complete course. And so the child has lived with the disease for over five years.

Many others, each with much the same story, pour in as screening begins in a tent set up in an open field near the train. It has rained heavily the previous night and is still drizzling. Doctors, interns, Lifeline staffers and hundreds of children with their parents – obviously in discomfort as they stand patiently waiting their turn – brave the rain and the slush to fulfil a long-awaited dream for better health. The luckier of the children will require nothing more than a few months of physiotherapy that can be administered at home by their family. Doctors painstakingly demonstrate to parents the simple exercises that can put their children back on their feet. By noon, five children have been detailed for surgery and a team of doctors at the train ready themselves for the first two operations.

One of the children, 11-month-old Somnath, is to undergo corrective surgery for an inrolled foot, known in medical terms as CTEV – congenital telipo equino varus. He is too young to be fazed by the prospect of an operation, but as the surgery gets under way his mother waits nervously in the rain for word of her son. Finally, she touches the feet of one of the doctors as he assures her, an agonizing hour later, that the surgery has been a success.

The second to be wheeled in after a customary bath and change of clothes is eight-year-old Mangalbai, who is to be operated on for tendoachilles lengthening. Her father, Namdeo Rathore, is stoic, confident that his daugther is in safe hands. Afterwards, Somnath and Mangalbai spend two hours in the train's ward, before being transferred to the Central Railway Engineering Institute at Manmad. The residential quarters at the institute have been converted into a recuperative unit for 200 patients. Each one, along with a relative, stays on here for another five days to ensure thorough post-surgery care.

But not all patients are as lucky as these two have been. Several other children are diagnosed as having cerebral palsy. Doctors at the Lifeline Express can do little for these youngsters, and are hard-pressed to explain the situation to their disappointed parents. Indubai, the mother of two-year-old Pappu Wable, a child who has never sat up or spoken since birth, breaks down as doctors tell her that she must travel to one of the larger hospitals in Bombay for her son to be treated. Asked as she prepares to leave the camp whether she will take him, she casts an anguished look. "Where would we stay?" she says. "Who will treat poor people like us in that big city? No, I will not be able to go."

Her words are echoed by others who have waited long hours only to learn that they must seek help elsewhere. Their needs might be met if the Lifeline team could establish a referral system, whereby the poor could be treated at larger hospitals free of charge. But that is not the reality now.

For those associated with the Lifeline Express, the experience has been a learning process right from the time the first camp was set up in Khalari, in the mineral rich state of Bihar in northeastern India last year. As Zelma Lazarus, director of the IMPACT India Foundation, explains: "Each camp brought to our notice our limitations and shortcomings, which we have worked to rectify," she says. "Over the past year, we have put such experience to good use by constantly improving the role of support services. Nearby primary health care centres, for example, are of paramount importance for the Lifeline Express, especially for patient screening."

One of the shortcomings discovered in earlier camps was the lack of pre-screening facilities, which resulted in thousands of people descending on the train with a variety of ailments. Drawn by word of mouth about a miracle train, the patients would often grow restless when it became known that the doctors aboard could not treat their problems, which ranged from headaches to infertility. Says Nita Chandiramani, communications officer at IMPACT India Foundation, "I still vividly remember the scene at the earlier camp at Gauriganj, where a father whose daughter, a patient with cerebral palsy, was turned away. To express his frustration, he let out a stream of expletives, hollering that the entire exercise was a sham."

It is the problem of overblown expectations that the Lifeline Express keeps encountering, and will perhaps continue to encounter, says UNDP resident representative in India, Erling Dessau. "The unique nature of the project has received wide media coverage in India and all over the world – creating special problems, including expectations from the Lifeline Express that tend to exceed its capacity. But it remains a most innovative and effective initiative, and UNDP is proud to be associated with it." The UN agency has provided funding to IMPACT India to help it meet staffing and administrative costs, and has also provided office space for the foundation in Bombay.

At Manmad, the spadework began three months before the Lifeline Express steamed in. An advance team worked in close cooperation with government health services and activated the primary health centres in every village within a 48-kilometre radius. The advance team worked in tandem with the district health officer to convene a series of meetings with government doctors from more than 50 villages. The goal: to set up a fail-safe screening system to identify only polio, eye and ear patients.

These doctors were also entrusted with the task of publicizing the Lifeline Express, explaining the time schedule for treating the different disabilities, and making up the list of patients who had been screened and accepted for treatment. Despite close cooperation with rural medical services, in several instances the screening was not adequate. Patients had to be turned away at the last minute because their disability required more complicated surgery than the Lifeline Express could handle.

The concept of using India's vast railway system to deliver health services to the rural poor goes back 30 years. The idea was originally voiced by India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, who said to Sir John Wilson, a prominent British advocate for the disabled: "You know sometime you ought to use a train, the Indian Railways. It is the most efficient thing in India and covers every village." That conversation was recalled by Sir John, who is now a senior consultant for IMPACT India, on a visit to Bombay in July 1992.

Nehru's vision, however, was only realized two years ago, when a group of IMPACT India volunteers decided to act on the idea. The rationale went along these lines: India is a country of nearly 70 million disabled, for half of whom disability could be avoided.

Moreover, the crush of patients on India's health services is enormous. There are 2,350 persons per doctor, and 1,096 persons per hospital bed. But India is also a country with 65,000 kilometres of track carrying some 11,000 trains to every nook and cranny of the country. There are also about 7,000 railway sidings where trains can be parked. And so, thought the small group of pioneers at IMPACT India, why not have railway coaches refurbished with modern medical and surgical facilities and travel to remote villages? There the coach could be shifted to a siding to serve

a walk-in hospital for
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In mid-1990, when
PACT India decided to
ve into action, it was
erwhelmed with the response it received
tionally from the government as well as
m the private sector. Three old coaches
re immediately released for remodelling
the then minister of railways, George
rmandes, and the redesigning work was
mpleted at a cost of US$143,000.

The front coach has an operating theatre
th three adjustable tables, a sterilization
om, a diagnostic centre and a lying-in
ard with 12 bunk-beds. The second coach
s been converted into living quarters for
e surgeons, doctors and paramedical
aff; the third has kitchen facilities, two
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The equipment on the train has been
ought and specially modified to survive
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he operating theatre has been likened to
e best in the world by doctors who have
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including sterilizers, suction apparatus,
icroscopes, diatherms and cautery ma-
hines. Most surgical paraphernalia such
s syringes, needles, masks and gloves, are
isposable to avoid problems of storage
nd for health and sanitary reasons.

The success of the Lifeline Express is
eing watched closely by officials of India's
Health Department looking for new les-
ons which may emerge in the field of rural
ealth. "The Lifeline Express is surely
nnovative, and if it continues successfully
t will provide substantial relief to a large
section of disabled people who might oth-
erwise not be able to get medical attention
so easily," says A.K. Mukherjee, an associ-
ate director general of health services for
the Government of India.

In Manmad, between 2 and 11 Septem-
ber, 101 polio patients received operations

Photos by Sara Brazinsky

Sufficient time is spent with each child to analyze their particular needs.

and 357 disabled persons were fitted with callipers. The eye camp, which began on 22 September for a 10-day period, registered 458 patients. Of these, nearly 141 were operated upon and eight were fitted with intraocular lenses by the third day. The ear camp began on 24 September and lasted 10 days, after which the Lifeline Express departed for yet another destination in western India.

Manmad too has raised some questions for the Lifeline Express team. For example, what happens when a child outgrows the callipers that they provide? Project officials hope that the parents will be motivated enough to buy a new set. But in rural areas, where parents lack extra funds or sometimes access to medical care, there is a need to be answered. Lifeline officials are also aware that 45-day camps need to be extended to treat more complicated cases of polio and eye and ear disabilities. They are determined to leave a permanent mark of victory over disability in the rural communities that they have served, and are working toward finding solutions.

One sign of success is that the Lifeline Express has evoked a great deal of interest in developing countries around the world. Several African countries have already sought advice on setting up a train of their own, as have countries nearer to India. If all goes well, officials associated with the programme say, within a few years there will be many more trains of hope rolling along the railway tracks of the developing world, bringing better health and a second chance to thousands.■

One sign of success is that the Lifeline Express has evoked a great deal of interest in developing countries around the world.

A father carries his disabled 14-year-old son through the mud and rain.

Gajra Kottary is an Indian freelance journalist. Sailesh Kottary is deputy resident editor of the Economic Times *in Bombay.*

The Sustainability Question: Are There Limits to Economic Growth?

By Paul Ekins

For decades, arguments have raged back and forth about the relationship between development and economic growth. Such arguments, as those presented in UNDP's *Human Development Report*, have enriched the concept of development and established that economic growth alone will not guarantee a better quality of life. But the mainstream consensus remains that growth is required for development to occur.

Moreover, there is widespread agreement that economic growth is not only necessary in the South, but also in the North. The justification given for the rich becoming richer is that, in the process, larger markets for Southern goods will be created and encourage development. Lurking behind this, however, is the tacit understanding that Northern business and the Northern public will insist on economic growth whatever the consequences for the Third World and for the global environment. Politically credible scenarios of the future therefore must provide for it.

Thus the *Brundtland Report* contemplates a five to tenfold increase in manufacturing output by the middle of the next century. Similarly, the *World Development Report 1992* of the World Bank envisages that Northern economies will grow by a factor of three, and Southern economies by a factor of five, by 2030, leading to a global economy that is 3.5 times larger than today's. Even with these differential growth rates, this scenario will greatly increase the already enormous inequalities in per capita incomes between North and South. As both reports also acknowledge, if environmental destruction increases at the same rate as GDP, the damage will be appalling. As far as the human species is concerned, it could prove terminal. Hence the call to make growth environmentally "sustainable."

Such a call prompts a number of questions. First, is it realistic to imagine that growth can be made so environmentally benign that 3.5 times today's world product will cause less environmental destruction than occurs today? Second, if not, does humanity really need economic growth of that dimension, even at the risk of its own survival? Third, is there any guarantee that environmental problems will be any easier to solve under conditions of slow or no growth?

The first question re-opens the "limits to growth" debate that burned in the 1970s and has simmered ever since. Those who propose limits maintain that increases in production, as measured by GDP, have been and will always be associated with an increase in environmental destruction. The laws of thermodynamics, they say, maintain that any increases in the economy's throughput of matter and energy (except renewable sources such as solar energy) must be associated with increases in negative environmental impact. The alternative view holds that it is possible to decrease environmental damage at a rate equal to or greater than the rate of GDP growth. In such a view, growth can proceed indefinitely.

Illustration by Rafal Olbinski

The difference between these positions cannot be resolved theoretically. In theory, either outcome is possible. The crucial question is, what is the relative probability of each?

In support of the "no limits" thesis, statistics can be produced which show falling energy intensities (energy consumption per unit of GDP) and declines of certain air emissions, even as economic growth is proceeding; for the future, practically unlimited technological opportunity is supposed. Proponents of "limits" point out that the absolute use of energy has increased even in countries with fal!ing energy intensities, and is projected to go on doing so. They also regard achievements in environmental quality as relatively trivial compared to the ongoing trends of environmental deterioration. It is certainly difficult to argue that, in the 20 years since the "limits to growth" debate began, environmental conditions or their future prospects have generally improved.

The jury is still out on both the "limits to growth" hypothesis and its converse, "environmentally sustainable growth." Conclusions reached on this question over the last 20 years can be summarized as follows:

■ The economic growth that has taken place during this period has not been environmentally sustainable. The negative environmental impact of growing economies has continued to increase. The theoretical possibility of environmentally sustainable growth has not been achieved.

■ Even if possible, achieving environmentally sustainable growth will be formidably difficult in practice. The *Brundtland Report* and the *1992 World Development Report* both call for unprecedented changes in patterns of production and institutional reform, threatening to significantly reduce the power of now dominant vested interests.

These conclusions provide a useful context for considering the second question: does humanity really need a gross world product that is more than tripled by 2030? Or, to be more specific, must the Southern economy grow fivefold, and the Northern economy threefold, over the next three and a half decades?

IT MAY BE THAT THE PRESSURES TOWARD GROWTH IN THE NORTH ARE SIMPLY TOO GREAT FOR CURRENT POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS TO STRIKE OUT ON A SUSTAINABLE PATH.

It is difficult for a Northerner to quarrel with the aspirations of the South to grow fivefold, especially bearing in mind that per capita incomes in low-income countries then would still be less than 10 per cent of present incomes in high-income countries. Such growth in the developing countries, which represent 75 per cent of the global population, would mean "only" a doubling of today's world product.

The question about Northern growth, however, is a different matter altogether. It is impossible to argue that such growth is necessary to meet basic material needs, because in rich countries, this has more to do with social policy than with growth itself. In the United States and the United Kingdom in the 1980s, for example, growth co-existed with deepening poverty and material deprivation.

The argument that Northern growth is necessary for Southern growth is also flawed. Such growth *might* quicken growth in the developing countries by providing larger markets. But the same effect would occur far more rapidly if present Northern markets were less protected against Southern manufactures. Moreover, it is surely possible that South-South trade between countries at similar levels of economic development provides the best prospect for balanced Southern expansion. This is opposed to the current skewed situation in which most Southern countries are locked into deteriorating terms of trade based on the export of commodities and the import of Western consumer goods. The world's trading system is biased too heavily towards the North for North-South trade to provide a motor for Southern development.

This means identifying those actions that violate the principle of environmental sustainability and taking the necessary steps to eliminate them. Such action with regard to the ozone layer has already been taken through the Montreal Protocol, which will eventually phase out ozone-depleting substances. A similar approach needs to be taken to reduce carbon dioxide and other gases to stabilize atmospheric concentrations and head off the greenhouse effect. Emissions generally need to be kept within the environment's absorptive capacities. Renewable resources need to be renewed. Exhaustible resources need to be depleted no quicker than substitutes can be built up. Species must be conserved. Risks of catastrophe, such as those arising from the use of nuclear energy, should be eliminated, however minimal the risk.

GROWTH EMPHASIZING AN INCREASE IN GROSS NATURE PRODUCT, RATHER THAN GROSS NATIONAL PRODUCT, IS A PREREQUISITE TO CREATING A GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT THAT CAN SUSTAINABLY SUPPORT MORE THAN TWICE THE CURRENT POPULATION.

Ruling out the arguments based on basic needs and Southern development, we are left with the likely real reason behind the call for economic growth in the North: that is, that Northern countries are determined, above all else, to have it. This is tantamount to saying that if there must be a choice between Northern growth and environmental sustainability, the present generation of Northerners can be relied on to choose growth *now*, even at the cost of collapsing living standards for future generations. Such an attitude is clearly problematic ethically. It is also completely at odds with the "precautionary principle" agreed upon at the Rio Earth Summit by the world's governments.

For those who cannot accept this attitude, the good news is that it is not altogether necessary to reject growth in the North. It is necessary only to put sustainability first.

If the "no limits" enthusiasts are right, then these measures can be taken at little cost. Economic growth will not be materially affected and "environmentally sustainable growth" will have been achieved. If the "limits" analysis is correct, then these measures will result in a reduction in growth and may even cause GDPs to decline.

There is no denying that slow or no-growth economies in the North over a prolonged – perhaps indefinite – period represent a profound political and economic challenge. Populations in the North have deeply embedded expectations of annual rises in real income. Northern business is similarly wedded to the idea of infinitely expanding markets. Governments have become dependent on growth to fund fiscal deficits and programmes of social welfare. And, of course, growth has been the means by which annually increasing labour productivity has not been converted wholesale into unemployment.

By itself, low or no growth will do nothing to achieve sustainability. If it results, as it has in some countries today, in a demoralized public which has aspirations to revive growth at any cost, then its effect may well be worse on the environment than an expanding economy — which at least sees the private sector investing in new environmentally friendly technologies. It is likely that the only low or no-growth outcome that is either environmentally beneficial or socially supportable will result from determined government policies to move towards sustainability, with a population firmly behind this goal.

It may be that the pressures toward growth in the North are simply too great for current political institutions to strike out on a sustainable path. In this case, the only certain conclusion is that gross disruption of economic life will prevail, as natural laws force the adaptation of human economies to ecological realities. Political institutions will either become more authoritarian to cope, or anarchy will become the order of the day. In other words, social stability in the face of grave ecological problems will be enforced by repressive and antidemocratic means, or it will cease to exist. Resurgent nationalism and racism in Europe, and the bloodbath in former Yugoslavia, leave no doubt as to the force and ugliness of possible political developments when institutions prove unable to cope with frustrated expectations and inexorable change.

The sustainability challenge is hardly less in the South, because of the clear imperative for this growth to be qualitatively different from what has occurred before.

Much of the growth in the past has been at the expense of forests, soils, fisheries, rivers and fossil fuels. Future growth will have to derive from the regeneration of renewable resources and whole ecosystems, and from far more environmentally-sensitive technologies. There is enough small-scale experience to show that this qualitatively different growth *is* possible. But making it become the dominant model of economic growth throughout the South will require institutional change as positive and progressive as any in the North. It will have to begin with Southern societies becoming more democratic and participatory, with local people having control over local resources and having incentives to preserve these resources for their own long-term subsistence. This kind of growth, emphasizing an increase in Gross Nature Product, rather than Gross National Product, is a prerequisite to creating a global environment that can sustainably support more than twice the current population.

Perhaps there *are* miracle technologies around the corner which will drastically reduce the environmental impact of global consumption. Perhaps this *is* the only realistic possibility of meeting the sustainability challenge. Perhaps it *is* hopelessly naive to expect that current power structures can be transformed so that "enough" becomes their primary objective rather than forever "more." Even if all the above are true, then the miracle technologies had better start to be implemented — and fast. And those who believe that sustainability will require more than a technical fix — and spells the end of unlimited growth — must work to generate the "spirit of Rio" that was invoked at the Earth Summit. Based on a moral contract with God, a social contract with humanity and an ethical contract with nature, such a spirit may be all that stands between humankind and utter chaos if technology fails the sustainability test. ■

Paul Ekins, author of The Gaia Atlas of Green Economics, *published by Anchor Books, is a research fellow in economics at Birkbeck College, University of London. He has served as director of The Other Economic Summit and is research director of the Right Livelihood Award (the "Alternative Nobel Prize").*

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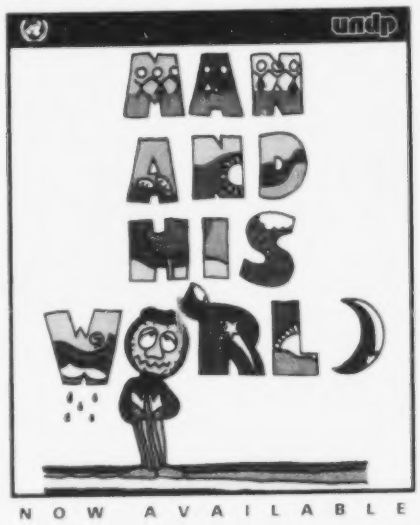

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